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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish Bird News

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Assisted by Sylvia Laing and
Joan Wilcox

The Firth of Clyde

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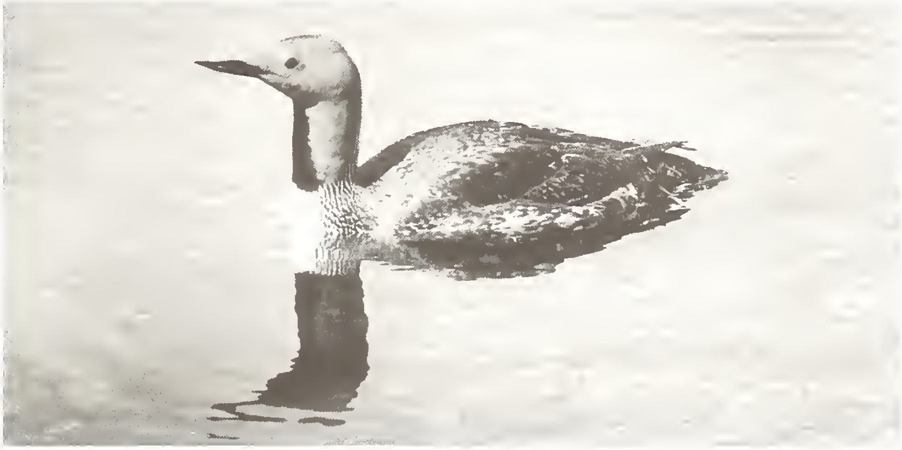
Firths and sea lochs are major features of the Scottish landscape. Many have important wildlife populations. Scottish Natural Heritage has, in recent years, recognised the importance of Scottish Firths through its Focus on Firths initiative and through its publication Firths in SNH Scotland's Living Landscapes series in July 1997. The Focus on Firths is a voluntary Scotland wide initiative set up by SNH to promote the integrated management of the natural resources of all 5 of the major Scottish Firths, Moray, Tay, Forth, Clyde and Solway, and to safeguard their future.



Red-throated Diver *William Paton*

Ornithological interest

To date, the ornithological interest of Scottish firths has largely been focused on the east coast, and the SOC has recently played host to several papers and reports outlining bird populations and their significance, eg Tay (N Elkins & B M Lynch 1997 Waterfowl counts on the Tay Estuary 1985-1995 *Scottish Birds* 19:36-54), Forth (*SBN* 49 March 1998) and Moray, (R J Evans 1998 Numbers of wintering seaducks, divers and grebes in the Moray Firth 1977-1995 *Scottish Birds* 19:206-222). These represent the results of sustained observations over a long period of time, combining amateur work with professional contract surveys.

In contrast, the Firth of Clyde has received comparatively little ornithological attention. Few birdwatchers view the Firth of Clyde as an entity, and traditional allegiances are reflected and reinforced by the current bird recording areas: Ayrshire, inner Clyde, Argyll, Arran, Clyde Islands etc. Recognition of the Firth of Clyde as an important ornithological area will only take place once a period of concerted and coordinated recording effort is published.

Monitoring

This is not to say that no monitoring is taking place. WeBs coverage is growing. The Clyde estuary has been monitored for nearly 30 years, through the coordination of Iain Gibson, Roger Broad and now Jim and Val Wilson. The Ayrshire coast is also now well covered during the winter months by Brian Orr and his team. Outside of these areas, there are small pockets of regular coverage, such as Lochgilp by Simon Lawrence, Great Cumbrae by John Allan, parts of the Arran coast coordinated through Audrey Walters and Duncan Stevenson, and parts of eastern Cowal through Nigel Scriven and Ben Ross. However, in many cases the counting season needs to be extended and these counts need to be coordinated and the results collated into a Firth of Clyde context. There is also a very real need to begin filling the major gaps in regular WeBs coverage, such as the Kyles of Bute, the Bute coastline, Loch Riddon, the rest of Arran, Otter Ferry and other parts of Loch Fyne, East Kintyre and Campbeltown Loch. However, this will require the mobilisation of local birdwatchers in Argyll, Bute and Arran, supplemented by contributions from visiting birdwatchers. In addition to WeBs, there has been some breeding regular seabird monitoring by the Clyde Ringing Group (Sanda) Glasgow University (Ailsa Craig) RSPB (Horse Island) and SNH (Little Cumbrae), but this has been on selected species, with few comprehensive surveys. The last summaries of the seabirds of the Firth of Clyde were published in the mid 1980s (P Monaghan & B Zonfrillo 1986 Population dynamics of seabirds in the Firth of Clyde, *Proceeding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 90B, 363-375) and in the early 1990s in C Lloyd, M Tasker & K Partridge 1991 *Status of Seabirds* Poyser, London. Again, more complete and coordinated monitoring is required.

As an example, in September 1997 a network of 31 people counted Eiders throughout the entire Firth of Clyde over a period of 10 days. Coverage was achieved for approximately 80% of the coastline and an impressive 19,500 birds were recorded. On this basis, more than 1 in 5 of British Eiders were in the Firth of Clyde at that time. This population is close to the 20,000 threshold for international importance. If this and similar widescale monitoring takes place for at least 5 years it is likely that internationally important population figures will be found for many species.

Another example, gleaned from Ayrshire and Clyde bird reports and the WeBs summary, shows that during the last 2 days of March 1996, there were probably at least 500 Red-throated Divers in Firth of Clyde waters.

A brief review of recent local bird reports and WeBs summaries suggests that the species shown in the table could achieve national or international significance.

The focus for future monitoring and assessment should be through the Clyde Estuary Forum, supported by SNH and RSPB (amongst others), which could help to coordinate voluntary efforts and to seek support for professional contract surveys.

International
Non breeding

Slavonian Grebe
Eider
Red-breasted Merganser
Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
Redshank
Curlew
Turnstone
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull

Breeding

Gannet
Lesser Black-backed Gull

The SOC should offer encouragement to the Forum. Currently there is no Project Officer for the Clyde, but further information can be sought from **Clyde Estuary Forum, c/o Scottish Natural Heritage, Caspian House, 2 Mariner Court, 8 South Avenue, Clydebank Business Park, Clydebank G81 2NR or from the Glasgow & Clyde Valley Structure Plan Team, 10 Killermount Street, Glasgow G2 3NW.**

However, if it is acceptable to throw the ball into the Clyde Estuary Forum court for coordination, then we in the SOC and other similar groups in the west of Scotland must be prepared to pick up that ball when it is thrown back to us for fieldworker support.

National
Non breeding

Red-throated Diver
Black-throated Diver
Little Grebe
Great Crested Grebe
Cormorant
Shag
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Shelduck
Wigeon
Teal
Scaup
Goldeneye
Golden Plover
Purple Sandpiper

*If anybody is interested in participating in coordinated fieldwork in the Firth of Clyde please contact me at **73 Stewart Street, Carluke ML8 5BY (01555 750719)** in the interim.*

Chris Waltho, Clyde Branch

Eider *David Hassell*

Pylon casualties within the Clyde Valley

Since the late 1980s, an alarming number of birds have been reported striking power lines running at right angles between the RSPB reserves of Barons Haugh and Merryton in the Clyde Valley. Both sites attract a wealth of wildfowl and water birds to the area.

However, the 'obstruction' of these cables has led to the deaths of up to 250 birds (of 26 different species) which have been found beneath the cables since 1989. With regular flooding in the area washing corpses away and the occasional Fox lifting freshly dead birds, one can hazard a guess that the true figures are higherr but unknown.

Much easier to find, though, were both Whooper and Mute Swans which have been particularly vulnerable to pylon strikes here. Indeed, within a 4 winter monitoring period (1989-1993), a total of 41 swan corpses were found. Others will have been washed away unnoticed during high flood periods, but alone, the figure within that relatively short period of time gave cause for concern.

Owing to the national importance of Whooper Swans and frequent occurrence of Mute Swans at these sites, it was deemed necessary to investigate the factors which caused such strikes with the intention of identifying any preventative measures.

Observations of flight paths of all species flying up and down the valley were made during this period to identify the effect of the power line 'obstruction'. In most cases, all species made an attempt (sometimes repeatedly) to clear the top earth wire being of a thinner width to that of the live conductor cables.

Regarding Whooper Swans, however, frequent observations highlighted that their approach to the power cables were met with some uncertainty, almost a disorientation of how to negotiate such an obstruction. Mute Swans showed no distinct pattern - some flew precariously under, over and through the cables. Whoopers, always attempted to go over the power lines, accompanied by increased vocalisation as they drew nearer to the pylons.

Increased vocalisation could suggest stress perhaps. It could be argued that, owing to a swans' poor forward vision, they are attempting to clear the uppermost live conductor cable only to realise that an additional thinner and less visible earth wire exists causing a panic reaction. Furthermore, owing to a relatively large body mass, a swan flying at 30-50mph with minimal agility has little chance of avoiding such a hazardous feature.

Indeed, as mirrored in studies elsewhere, the conclusion of the Merryton/Barons Haugh 'hotspot' suggests that the earth wire is the contributory factor to causing most bird strikes.

Regular discussions with the RSPB and Scottish Power during this period led to action being undertaken by the electricity company to increase the width of the earth wire in the summer of 1993. Despite suggestions to fit either light weight 'day-glo' balls or other marker devices such as ribbons etc, Scottish Power entered the technological stakes by wrapping a fibre optic cable round the earth wire to increase the diameter from 19mm to 31mm. Thus telephone signals can now be transmitted along the same routes as electricity! An article to this effect was in the *Evening Times*, 12 September 1994.

It was hoped that this positive response from Scottish Power would prove beneficial and that a new phase of monitoring would produce positive results. At the time, I had expressed cautious optimism. However, it was emphasised that, should the problem still exist, Scottish Power would continue to remain sympathetic to this sensitive site and that the company would endeavour to identify a satisfactorysolution.

Five winter periods have now passed and results have been produced for readers to draw their own conclusions.

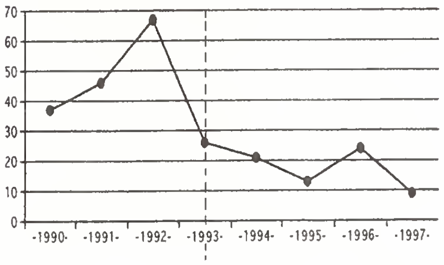
Summary of bird casualties

Figure 1 shows the total of bird casualties per annum involving 26 species. In most cases, casualties other than swans were predominantly medium sized birds such as gulls and wildfowl, waders (Curlew & Lapwing), several Coots and the odd pigeon. Detecting smaller birds beneath the pylons presents its own difficulty but a Blackbird, Song Thrush and Redwing were found. Four Herons and 3 Cormorants represented the larger species found.

Figure 2 shows the total swan strikes per winter season from October - April. Three swan strikes were noted outside the 'strike' period. Similar to the previous graph, a reduction of strikes following the introduction of the increased diameter width is indicated but, interestingly, the

Whooper Swan *Stan da Prato*

Figure 1 ***Annual comparison of bird strikes (n=239)***

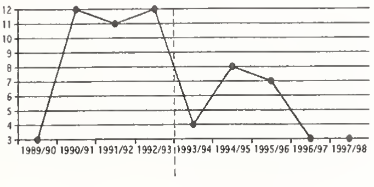


x - Period when earth wire diameter was increased.

graph clearly shows a reduction of casualties found, a 51% drop since the earth wire diameter increase. However, other contributory factors should also be considered before a conclusion is drawn. Firstly, regular flooding not only washes away corpses but also prevents site inspection to the 'impact' area; secondly, refraining from visiting the site to avoid disturbance to all wildfowl and other bird species; and lastly, irregular visits by myself due to changing circumstances (ie studies) from autumn 1993 - spring 1996.

Indeed, the last factor is untimely allowing the reader to believe that the installation of the fibre optic cable around the earth wire in June 1993 may have created a positive effct - an unfortunate coincidence.

Figure 2 ***Total swan strikes per winter season Oct - Apr (n =63)***



x - Period when earth wire diameter was increased.

latter 2 winter periods, when normal monitoring was resumed, does seem to demonstrate that a positive effect has been gained.

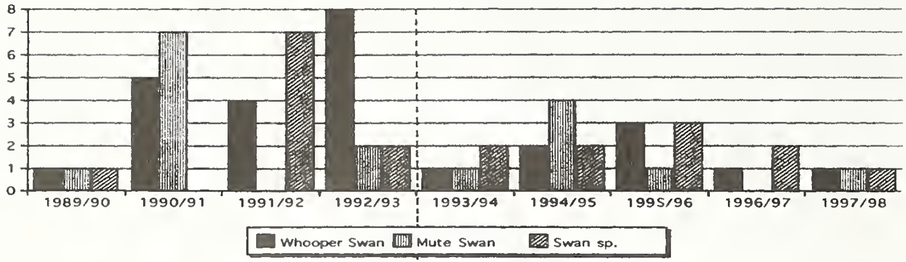
Figure 3 shows a breakdown of casualties per swan species. Remains found beyond identification have been placed into the swan sp category (fox predated).

It could be argued that the 56% reduction in Whooper Swan mortalities since 1993 may well be attributable to the earth wire diameter increase. As stated earlier, Whoopers have demonstrated their preference to clear the top earth wire and, with fewer strikes now being recorded since this date, does seem to suggest that the cable is more visible during flight approach.

However, in Mute Swans, a slight reduction of 30% since 1993 does not yet seem to suggest a favourable conclusion. Strikes involving this species are more likely from autumn onwards as post breeding dispersal becomes more evident. Movement is also increased when ponds freeze over and birds are forced to search for alternative waters. Such birds are then very vulnerable to strikes owing to their unfamiliarity with landmarks and surroundings, unlike Whoopers, which gradually become 'conditioned' as winter progresses as they pass over the cables, twice daily to feed at Merryton and return to Barons Haugh to roost.

No change, however, was noted in the amount of unidentifiable remains of swans since 1993. Obviously, the true identity of birds within this category would provide a clear picture of which species is the most vulnerable. Owing to the precarious approaches observed by Mute Swans the speculation is that this species is a more likely casulaty.

Figure 3 ***Winter season comparisons of swan strikes (Oct - Apr)***



X - indicates the period when the earth wire diameter was increased

First glance indicates a favourable comprison since 1993. The number of casualties recorded in the 'unidentified' (swan sp) category could well relate to Mute Swan thus presenting no positive evidence for this species at this site here. Whooper Swan strikes have certainly reduced which indicates that the earth wire diameter increase has made some effect. However, with strikes still occurring involving both species at this site, it seems the ideal solution has not yet been achieved.

Conclusion

Overall, the effect of the earth wire diameter increase has produced a 35% reduction in swan strikes since 1993.

The reduction in Whooper Swan mortality since then may be regarded as a welcome outcome but strikes of this species still occur. The outcome for Mute Swans remains inconclusive. Their approach to the pylons suggests that this species remains vulnerable to striking cables. This report therefore confirms that swans are still vulnerable to strikes, suggesting that the Merryton/Barons Haugh site has not yet achieved an ideal solution.

By no means is this research complete, another winter period approaches to offer the opportunity of continued monitoring at this now well documented 'hotspot'.

Iain English

Secretary of State backs efforts to reduce persecution

Scottish Secretary Donald Dewar has thrown his weight behind efforts to reduce the illegal persecution of birds of prey, birds which he says are national assets.

Mr Dewar was visiting the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair at the RSPB's Vane Farm reserve where he launched the damning report *The Illegal Persecution of Raptors in Scotland* originally published in *Scottish Birds*.

He described the illegal persecution of Golden Eagles and Peregrines as "a national disgrace".

"The Government is committed to strengthening protection for wildlife and in due course the Scottish Parliament will consider proposals from the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime, which includes the police, Customs and Excise, Scottish Natural Heritage, the RSPB and other conservation bodies."

The report, prepared by the Scottish Raptor Study Groups, outlines the massive scale of such illegal activities. Raptor worker Keith Brockie said Peregrines were regularly persecuted in both Perthshire and Angus, but finding evidence or proving persecution is difficult, as those responsible are skilful at concealing it.

"But where 2 estates in the same area have consistently different breeding success rates in neighbouring glens, something is wrong," he said. Often it is only statistics like these which show up illegal human interference.

"We had hoped things would improve, but this year persecution has been worse than ever," Keith said later.

Visiting the police wildlife officers' exhibition at the Fair, Mr Dewar spoke of public disapproval of such activities and stressed the role of public opinion in making it clear to those responsible that their actions would not be tolerated.

"The Government and no doubt the Scottish Parliament, will take all possible steps to eliminate persecution." The Secretary of State's comments echo those of the Scottish Office Minister responsible for the Environment. In the Forward to *Counting the Cost*, a glossy and attractive publication which will take the results of the Raptor Study Group forward to a wider audience, Lord Sewel said "Scotland's wonderfully diverse wildlife is a national treasure, and wildlife crime is a crime against us all. It is particularly despicable when it takes the form of the illegal persecution of magnificent birds of prey, which give pleasure to thousands."

"We are all aware, sadly, of individual incidents of wildlife crime in Scotland, such as the theft of eggs and the shooting, trapping or poisoning of birds of prey. Successful prosecution of these crimes arouses considerable publicity and quite justified outrage against the perpetrators. The scale of illegal persecution against some of our birds of prey is sufficient to limit the geographical range of the species concerned in several areas of Scotland. The illegal persecution of raptors in many parts of Scotland is widespread. In some areas, persecution rather than lack of suitable habitat is the main reason why birds of prey are scarce or non-existent."

"I regard it as a national disgrace that illegal persecution is still taking place on such a scale and the Government will continue to take all steps within its power to reduce and eliminate it."

Peregrine *William Paton*

Plans for Cairngorms and Loch Lomond national parks

According to Magnus Magnusson Chairman of Scottish Natural Heritage there will be 2 national parks up and running in Scotland by 2005. Launching a detailed proposal to establish the first parks around Loch Lomond and in the Cairngorms, Magnus said he thought they would be given the go ahead. Plans for creating 2 nature conservation and cultrual heritage zones costing more than £5 million each year to run have been set out by SNH who want them run independent authorities with statutory powers to influence planning, housing, economic development and rural land use. The final decision on national parks will be made by the Scottish Parliament.

The establishment of national parks would finally bring Scotland into line with almost every other country in the world. Their absence has been an embarrassment, especially since the man credited with the original idea of national parks was a Scot, John Muir.

There is emphasis in SNH's proposals on the need for community involvement in the national park authorities. It suggests that up to two thirds of the bodies should be community councillors and local authority appointees.

Under the SNH plan the park bodies will not take powers from councils or national bodies, but will replace voluntary agreements involoving, for example, the Cairngorms Partnership, with ones based on statutory authority.

The parks would be tailored to suit their surroundings. The proposal for the Loch Lomond and Trossachs park envisages enhanced powers for controlling the growth of marine traffic on the loch, while the Cairngorms park would have special responsibility over efforts to control deer numbers. SNH believes at least 75% of resources should come from that source. Highland Council, which has been opposed to national parks, seems prepared to accept the SNH proposal. Its convener, Peter Peacock, who sits on the main SNH board, said the recommendations took account of many of the worries of the local authorities and communities. 'The council will also be reassured that planning pwoers will continue to rest in the democratic control of councils and that additional money will be needed which should be primarily funded by the nation as a whole.'

However, Councillor Michael Foxley, chairman of the council's land and environment committee, said 'I am disappointed that the needs and interests of the wider Highlands are not fully covered by this consultation document. 'We believe the Highlands as a whole is an area of outstanding natural and cultrual heritage value which needs special recognition and support'.

Funds will help locals bid for estates

At the Labour Party Conference plans were announced for a fund worth up to £150 million which could be used by local communities and conservationists to buy Highland estates such as Knoydart. This follows controversies over attempts by local communities and pressure groups to buy Highland estates like Glen Feshie in the Cairngorms, Knoydart or the Isle of Eigg.

Bids backed by groups such as the World Wide Fund for Nature to buy Glen Feshie and Knoydart earlier this year failed mainly because they could not raise enough cash and private buyers stepped in.

The bid for Glen Feshie was given public backing by the Scottish environment minister, Lord Sewel, and Scottish Natural Heritage, as part of the Government initiative to support community land purchases across the Highlands. However, it is thought that National Heritage Lottery Fund board members did not want to spend millions more in Scotland because public funds had already been used to buy Mar Lodge for the National Trust for Scotland.

The Isle of Eigg was bought by the local community for £1.5 million last year only after years of controversy. Media sources also say that the Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, a keen hill walker, has won Cabinet support to allocate funds which could be used to buy important estates.

Ministers have already announced that the bulk of the New Opportunities Fund will be dedicated to health and education projects, with bids for money overseen by the Lotteries Board. The new fund will also allow local people to bid for money for local projects, which could include local parks, wildlife reserves or bringing estates into community ownership.

Charles Frank

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The SOC New Year Bird Count 1998

Firstly I would like to apologise for the brevity of this article. 1998 has been a rather hectic year for me, I became editor of the Lothian Bird Report among other things. This has meant that I have been unable to give the NYBC my full attention and this article, is just a sketch of what happened in the 1998 count. I hope to be able to prepare a fuller article next year as we move towards the New Year Bird Count 2000.

Starling *David Mitchell*

Thank you to everyone who took part despite the horrendous weather that greeted 1998. A total of 141 species were seen by 83 counters who covered 84 tetrads. Some counters shared the counting with others while a few hardy souls counted more than one tetrad. The most species seen in any single tetrad was 78 in a Fife coastal tetrad. No one was unlucky enough to see no birds and the lowest count from any tetrad was 5 species. Lothian had more species seen on the count than any other area but here there were 19 tetrads covered varying from upland reservoirs to Musselburgh Lagoons. Shetland had the lowest total of any area where there was a counter but the solitary counter was counting on the farthest north island of Unst.

This table shows the number of tetrads, counters and species observed for each area.

Area	Tetrads	Counters	Tot spp
Borders	6	5	69
D&G	4	4	58
Ayr	3	4	67
Lothian	19	16	101
Fife	5	6	97
Forth	2	3	45
Clyde	6	6	50
Argyll	1	1	28
P&K	6	5	52
A&D	3	3	64
North East	7	12	64
M&N	1	1	32
Highland	14	12	95
Caithness	3	3	53
O. Heb	2	2	59
Orkney	0	0	0
Shetland	1	1	12
Total	83	84	141

The 10 most numerous species on the count in 1998.

	Nos	Species
1	6364	Woodpigeon
2	5786	Black-headed Gull
3	4029	Herring Gull
4	4022	Rook
5	3081	Starling
6	2258	Oystercatcher
7	2128	Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove
8	1972	Jackdaw
9	1884	Chaffinch
10	1788	Common Gull

As can be seen these are all conspicuous social species which are common on agricultural land and other open spaces. None of the big goose roosts were counted in 1998 so there are no wildfowl in the top ten.

The 10 most widespread species as recorded by the New Year Bird Count 1998.

	Species	No of tetrads
1	Blackbird	77
2	Carrion/Hooded Crow	75
3	Chaffinch	73
4	Woodpigeon	72
5	Blue Tit	66
6	Robin	65
7	Great Tit	62
8	Starling	58
9	Wren	56
10	Coal Tit	54

Only 3 species which are among the 10 most numerous species are in the list of the 10 most widespread species. These are the Woodpigeon, Starling and Chaffinch. It is notable that all 3 of the common woodland tits are in this list of widespread birds and all of these species could be regarded as garden birds, ie birds which have adapted to human influences on the countryside and which can survive in towns.

All of the most numerous and widespread species are resident in Scotland although their numbers are boosted by birds which stay in Scotland over winter. True winter visitors are not as numerous or widespread. Other species which are regarded as residents would appear to largely desert Scotland in winter. An example is the Skylark which was recorded in a mere 12 tetrads, surely a result of birds moving to the south.

Some birds are naturally rare so there are very few records of large raptors such as Red Kite or Golden Eagle. The most widespread raptor was the Common Buzzard, recorded in 43 tetrads. This is a reflection of the Buzzard's recent increase and range expansion into eastern Scotland. Hopefully it won't be too long before the Red Kite shows a similar trend.

Birds new to the count this year included the Musselburgh Desert Wheatear which hung on into the New Year. In Fife, the Surf Scoters put in their annual appearance but Smew, Bewick's Swan and Canada Goose were not reported. Not counting Canada Geese may be something of a blessing but it was sad to find no count forms which recorded Corn Buntings.

Common Crossbills were reported from more tetrads this year following 1997's invasion. The only Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were in the Western Isles and Little Auks were reported from Islay and the Uists.

I hope to present a fuller treatment of the NYBC next year so please take part and use the form enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

David Kelly

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Biodiversity in Glasgow

At the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, 150 countries, including the UK, agreed to protect biological diversity. A number of organisations, both governmental and non governmental, have given priority to this issue and the UK Government has recommended that Local Biodiversity Action Plans should be produced. In the following article Iain Gibson, SOC Recorder and Glasgow's Conservation Officer, describes recent progress in the City of Glasgow.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) are essentially about nature conservation. However, within a densely populated and thriving business community like the City of Glasgow it is especially important that the green network of parks, open spaces and countryside is protected and enhanced. As well as helping wildlife, this enhances the quality of life for those who live or work in the city, and an improved environment is regarded by the Council to be an important factor in encouraging economic development and regeneration.

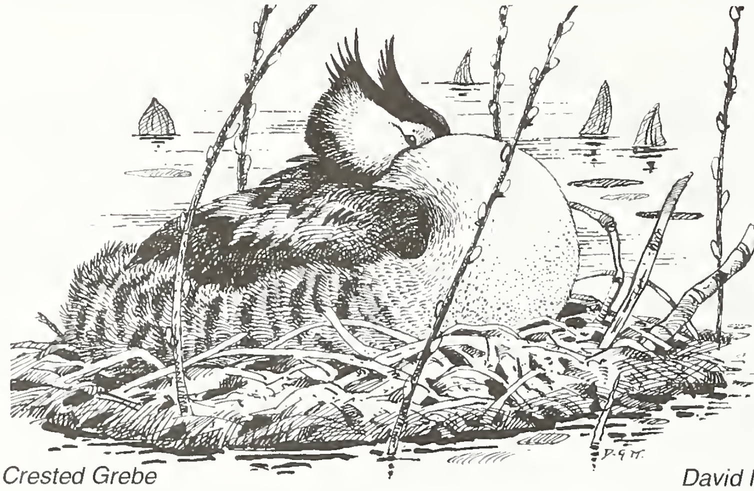
Commitment

In 1989 Glasgow City Council formulated a *Wildlife and Nature Conservation Policy Statement,* following the completion of a habitat survey which helped to identify *Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation* (SINCs) throughout the city.

Most people know that Glasgow is renowned for its heritage of fine parks but many are surprised to learn that about one quarter of all land within the city boundary is actually countryside. Some 79 SINCs are currently recognised by the Council, 40 of which are considered to be of city wide importance. The remaining sites are recognised as locally valuable.

A wide range of habitats is represented, including reedbeds, raised bog, seminatural woodland and neutral grassland. Not all are in urban fringe or countryside, some being relict sites within the built environment, others in parks. There are 5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the City - Fossil Grove (Victoria Park), Possil Marsh (an SWT reserve), Bishop Loch (in Greater Easterhouse), the seminatural woodlands of the Cart and Kittoch Valley, and a geological site at Waulkmill Glen.

In 1998 Glasgow's *Environment Strategy* identified requirements for the production of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan, with the Council playing a lead role in bringing together and involving interested parties and community representatives. A steering group consists of council officers and representatives of organisations including RSPB, SWT and FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group).



Great Crested Grebe David Mitchell

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan identifies a range of key habitats and species which require action plans or monitoring programmes. There are 2 lists of globally threatened or declining species - the priority list of species for which costed action plans have been (or are being) prepared, and a long list of species which require continued monitoring.

In addition the UK's leading non governmental bird conservation organisations have produced a document *Species of Conservation Concern* which identifies bird species which are threatened within a UK context. Various criteria are adopted, for example a rapid decline in population or a rapid contraction of range merits inclusion in the red list (requiring urgent conservation action), whilst species in moderate decline are amber listed. Even traditionally common birds like Skylark, Tree Sparrow and Reed Bunting are red listed, their populations having declined by 50% or more during the preceding 25 year period.

Birds are well recorded in Glasgow, thanks mainly to the SOC and the *Clyde Bird Report.* Information on other animals is not so comprehensive. Nevertheless, endangered mammals such as Water Vole and European Otter, fish such as Bullhead and Atlantic Salmon, and butterflies such as the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, have all been recorded on sites within the city. The Local Action Plan aims to ensure that Glasgow's biodiversity is both protected and enhanced. Public consultation in 1998 led to an encouraging response from many individuals and organisations, including strong support from the Chamber of Commerce and the Health Trusts, and of course, the Clyde Branch of SOC! It is encouraging that such a healthy cross section of the community cares about the quality of the local environment and its wildlife.

Implementation

Scottish Officer Minister Lord Sewell, on 4 December 1997, said that he regarded Local Biodiversity Actions Plans as 'a vital mechanism for implementing the Government's Biodiversity objectives.' The City Council, with support from the RSPB, SWT and Clyde Branch SOC, is already taking steps to implement some of the LBAP objectives. Its Environment Group (Planning) and Conservation Section (Land Services) are promoting biodiversity initiatives on council owned land, primarily in parks. These include native tree plantations, wildflower meadows and new wetland habitats, and Local Nature Reserves at Bishop Loch, Hogganfield Loch and Robroyston Park. Much of the work is being implemented by the Council and SNH supported *Countryside around Towns* projects, such as the Kelvin Valley Countryside Project.

The UK Action Plan recommends that appropriate key habitats and threatened species should be targeted for priority treatment. In Glasgow it has been decided initially to take special action for the wetland and neutral grassland habitats, as well as 3 animal species - the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, the Water Vole and the Reed Bunting.

Glasgow's contribution to biodiversity extends beyond the city. A wetland nature reserve is being developed beside the Council's waste landfill site at East Kilbride. This involves a partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust, who will carry out management of the 12 hectare reserve. A local SOC member, Bob Lambie, is a key member of the management committee, as the marsh has been his local patch for many years. Exciting opportunities are opened up by the landfill tax credit system, from which funds will be used to implement the management plan. This will diversify wetland habitat in the marsh, whilst protecting its most valuable botanical features. Ponds will be excavated for breeding waterfowl, and it is hoped to graze cattle on part of the site to improve the habitat for breeding waders.

The City Council is also working in partnership with SWT on a project entitled *Glasgow's Wildlife Heritage*. This project will involve survey work on SINCs, a selective programme of practical management work, and educational activities to help achieve the Council's objective of raising awareness of wildlife and environmental issues. Part of SWTs funding for this project has also been provided using landfill tax credits.

Hogganfield Park Local Nature Reserve

On Friday 20 March 1998, Frank McAveety, the leader of Glasgow City Council, announced the creation of Glasgow's second Local Nature Reserve at Hogganfield Park. It is seen as a prime contribution to the City's action for biodiversity.

The main feature of the new Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is Hogganfield Loch, a shallow loch extending to just over 21 hectares of open water, with a large wooded island. Originally created in the late 19th century, construction of stone embankments around most of the loch largely prevented the establishment of emergent vegetation, although to remedy this there are proposals to create reedbeds along the eastern shore of the loch.

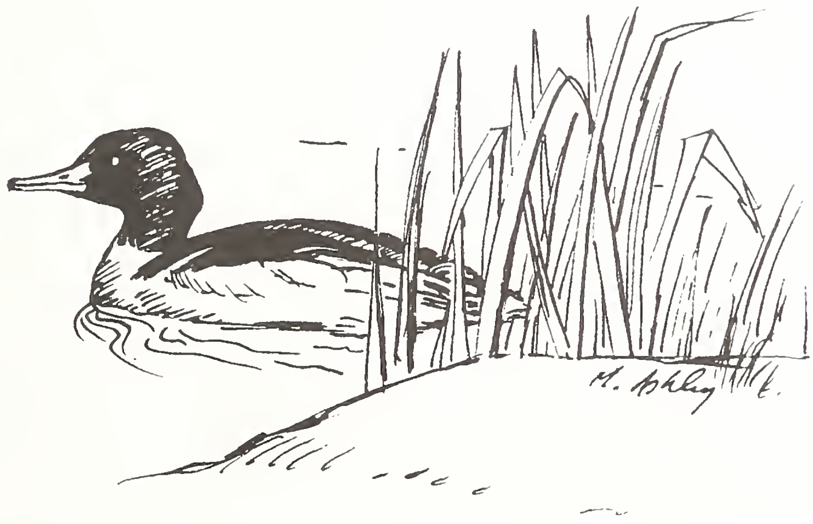
Over many years waterfowl numbers were somewhat suppressed by boating activities and the control of aquatic plants. For example, Great Crested Grebes did not begin to breed at the loch until as recently as 1988. The late 1980s saw a decline in boating, and consequently waterfowl numbers increased. In 1989, the City Council designated the park as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The loch is now a popular haunt of local birdwatchers and other naturalists. It presents ideal opportunities for local outings by SOC, YOC and other interested groups, and a 2 kilometre path around the loch provides a route which is ideal for walkers and wheelchair users.

Many birds have become used to the presence of humans, and even normally wary species like Whooper Swan, Goldeneye and Goosander can afford excellent views. The Clyde SOC participates in an annual birdwatching day organised by the Countryside Rangers. The sight of over 100 Goosanders fishing as a communal flock can be quite spectacular, and during the past few winters, up to 4 redhead Smews have also been entertaining birdwatchers by fishing only a few metres off the car park. This species was a natural choice for the LNR logo.

Hogganfield Loch is one of the top wintering waterfowl sites in the Clyde area. It is particularly important for Little Grebe (up to 56 in autumn), Mute Swan (a moult flock of 150 birds), Canada Goose (maximum count at roost 178 birds), Pochard (max count 260), Tufted Duck (max count 303), Goldeneye (max count 68), Goosander (max count 185 in November 1995 - a nationally important concentration), Ruddy Duck (38 in 1997/98, the only wintering flock in Scotland), and Coot (max count 468).

Four pairs of Little Grebes and one or 2 pairs of Great Crested Grebes now breed regularly at the loch, building their nests mainly on the overhanging branches of Crack Willows around the island.

Less common species appear from time to time, like the American Wigeon which spent the winter of 1996/97 commuting between Hogganfield Loch and Springburn Park Pond. The marsh on the eastern side of the park supports Jack Snipe and sometimes Stonechat in winter. Other recent sightings at the loch have included a Black-necked Grebe in 1995, a Little Ringed Plover in 1996, and a White-winged Black Tern in September 1997. Woodland visitors have included Pied Flycatcher and Lesser Whitethroat. The LNR's bird list currently stands at an impressive tally of 125 species.



Goosander *Mike Ashley*

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There is, of course, more to the reserve than its birds. Grasslands on the eastern side of the park are rich in wild flowers and provide habitat for various mammals, including occasional Roe Deer, as well as many insects. Management of the grassland specifically caters for butterfly conservaton, although birds also benefit - breeding Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and Grey Partridge ae unusual in an urgban context.

New wetlands have been excavated on the eastern side of the park, and other projects are involving local schools in the creation of wildflower meadows and an oak woodland. Eventually the City Council, in association with The Kelvin Valley Countryside Project, hopes to create a long distance footpath link between Hogganfield Park and Glasgow's other LNR, which is at Bishop Loch in Easterhouse.

Glasgow's Wildlife@ CD-ROM

A CD-ROM, *Glasgow's Wildlife* has been produced to assist schools with environmental education and to raise awareness of the city's wildlife. The interactive CD-ROM focuses on the 35 most important Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. It provides illustrated information on their location, habitats, species and other useful facts relating to access and educational opportunities.

Further information about the Hogganfield LNR, or to obtain a free copy of the CD-ROM (which runs on either windows 95 or Mac), contact The Conservation Officer, Glasgow City Council, Parks and Recreation, 37 High Street, Glasgow G1 1LX. (telephone 0141 287 3753 or e-mail: iain.gibson@pandr.glasgow.gov.uk).

Iain Gibson

Seabird 2000

Seabird 2000 is a major new national initiative to census all breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland. The project is a partnership between the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the statutory nature conservation country agencies, RSPB, the Seabird Group, Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group, the National Parks & Wildlife Service (Ireland) and Birdwatch Ireland. The aim of Seabird 2000 is to obtain, as accurately as possible, an estimate of the populations and distributions of each of the 24 species of seabird which regularly breed in Britain and Ireland. Both countries hold internationally important numbers of seabirds. If these populations are to be effectively conserved, it isimportant to accurately update our knowledge of their size and distribution.

The 2 main priorities for Seabird 2000 are, to resurvey all those sites which were covered in the last census and to expand coverage to sites which were not surveyed in the last census and which may not have been surveyed for almost 30 years since Operation Seafarer. In doing so, we would hope to improve our current knowledge of number and distributions of species such as petrels and shearwaters, which, due to inherent survey problems, is very incomplete.

This is a huge task, particularly in Scotland, where the majority of British seabirds breed. Seabird 2000 would not be possible without the efforts of dedicated volunteers and would benefit greatly from the input of SOC members.

Guillemots at Hermaness

Bobby Tulloch

The census work will take place between 1999 and 2001, commencing in April in order to count Black Guillemots and then continuing from mid May to late June when all other species will be counted. We aim to count all targeted colonies once during the 3 year period. The largest coastal colonies will be given priority in 1999, while in 2000, we aim to count all tern colonies. We would like to stress that living adjacent to the coast is not a prerequisite for becoming involved with Seabird 2000 there are many inland colonies of gulls and terns, including urban rooftop gull colonies, which need to be included in the census.

Anyone who wishes to take part in Seabird 2000 should contact **Dr Ian Mitchell at the Seabirds and Cetaceans Branch, JNCC, Dunnett House, 7 Thistle Lane, Aberdeen AB10 1UZ; fax: 01224 621488; e-mail: mitche l@jncc.gov.uk**

The Isle of May in 1998

April and May, with the exception of a Richards Pipit, were relatively quiet but June produced some fine late spring migration with Short-toed Larks, 2 Thrush Nightingales and 2 Red-backed Shrikes being recorded on1 June, Marsh Warbler on the 6th and Rustic Bunting and Quail on the 15th.

Seabirds had an indifferent breeding season with early Shag nests washed out by easterly gales in April. Many Shags relaid and a few were still feeding young in late August. Kittiwakes had a very poor season.

August proved to be quiet for migration, though a Barred Warbler was caught and ringed. In late August a further Icelandic Merlin was ringed, as was a Short-eared Owl which was mist netted. A Common Sandpiper was an unusual ringing species for the island.

One of the more interesting features of the autumn was one of the local fishing boats hitting the island just below the Low Light. The boat must have been very well built and appeared to suffer no obvious damage after the incident. Somebody had misset the automatic pilot. The crew seemed very surprised when they came on deck!

The May benefited from all the summer rain with more than adequate water supplies for the Low Light. The vegetation in the traps has grown extremely well and should provide good cover for migrants in due course.

With strong westerly winds throughout July and August, Storm Petrel ringing was relatively unproductive and Manx Shearwaters were only heard intermittently.

A change to more easterly weather in September led to many more migrants including an Ortolan Bunting, Wryneck, 250 Pied Flycatchers, 100 Garden Warblers and 80 Redstarts on 16 September.

Anyone interested in staying on the Island should contact. ***Mike Martin*, 2 Manse Park, Uphall, West Lothian EH 52 6NX. Tel 01506 855285 for further details.**

Ian Darling

Dipper feeding in sea

While on a visit to the Isle of Skye, about noon on Sunday 11 October 1998 my wife and I were birdwatching on the shore of Broadford Bay from the car park situated about 170 metres east of the mouth of the Broadford River when we were surprised to see a Dipper flying past us westwards along the sea shore. The bird alighted some 20 metres from us on the pebble shore then moved into the sea where it began feeding, dipping its head under the water but not totally immersing itself. This continued for some 10 minutes or so and from its movements the bird appeared to be turning over the pebbles to find its prey. Eventually it flew off westwards and passed under the road bridge, which is about 50 metres from the river mouth and the tidal limit.

The weather was fine with good visibility and the tide was almost at its highest. The sea was calm with little or no swell. There had, however, been heavy rain during the night and the Broadford River was in a moderate spate with only slight discoloration by peat. Late on the afternoon of the next day, when the river was back to its normal level, a Dipper was in its more normal habitat of the fast flowing and relatively shallow river a few metres up-stream of the road bridge.

According to all the literature the Dipper is confined to fast moving rivers or streams, with the possible exception that they 'occupy winter territories from October, sometimes on loch shores, and have frequently been watched feeding beneath ice' (Thom. *Birds in Scotland* 1986). As the sea rarely if ever freezes on the west coast of Scotland this would imply that 'loch shores' means fresh water lochs and not sea lochs.

Angus Smith

Great Skua attacking Sandwich Tern

At 1745 hours on Sunday 9 August 1998 on the Firth of Clyde at Cloch Point, my attention was drawn to a flurry of activity approximately 400 metres from the Renfrewshire shore. On investigation by telescope I saw an adult Great Skua attacking a Sandwich Tern. The tern seemed unable to rise from the surface of the water and it appeared that the skua was pecking at its head repeatedly. After about 2 minutes of this treatment the skua appeared to be holding the tern under the surface of the water and the tern ceased to struggle. I imagine at this point it was dead or near to death. The skua proceeded to pluck the tern. I watched the skua slowly drift with the tide for over 30 minutes while tearing at the body of the tern.

Frances Gatens

Great Skua chasing tern Barry Larking

Avian predation on gull and tern chicks

On 29 June 1998 whilst monitoring the tern colony at the Talisman Energy oil terminal at Nigg in Easter Ross I watched a few Common Terns repeatedly swooping at a clump of Dockens. This continued for about 5 minutes when suddenly a Crow rushed out, grabbed a nearby chick and pulled it back into the Dockens. The disturbed terns swooped down and tried to mob the Crow but it was quite safe from them under the tall plants. Quickly the colony settled down, with birds returning to incubate just a metre or 2 away from the Crow, leaving only a few birds to continue mobbing.

The next day we were ringing chicks in the colony and I located the remains of 3 partly consumed chicks under the patch of Dockens. On a return visit on 14 July I found several similar groups of partly eaten chicks under other groups of Dockens and Thistles where the Crow had obviously used the same method.

On the same day I watched a Buzzard using a similar technique in the terminal in a Common Gull colony. When disturbed the Common Gull chicks hid against a wire mesh fence about 2.5m high. The Buzzard had caught one of these chicks and was plucking it. The gulls were trying to swoop at the Buzzard and hit it but could not as it was hard up against the fence. The Buzzard had obviously employed this technique before as I found 4 plucked chicks up against the fence.

Despite this predation both the gulls and terns had their most productive breeding season of the 1990's with the Common Terns rearing 1.0 young per pair and the Common Gulls 1.2 young per pair. I would like to thank Talisman Energy for allowing access to the terminal and for providing financial support towards the monitoring work of the Highland Ringing Group.

Bob Swann

Black Grouse lekking during the middle of the day

On 25 April 1998, a warm dry and clear spring day, at 1315hrs in Glen Roy, Highland, my attention was drawn to the characteristic bubbling and hissing sounds made by displaying Black Grouse. A check of an adjacent lek site revealed 5 males and one female in full courtship. Although I have previously witnessed Black Grouse lekking at this, and other, arenas in mid morning, as well as in the early morning and late evening, I had not before seen such vigorous activity in the middle of the day. Witherby (1947 *The Handbook of British Birds*) wrote that 'at least at some leks birds display almost throughout the day'. More recent standard works such as the 2 breeding atlases refer only to lekking in the early morning while BWP states that Black Grouse assemble at both dawn and dusk and that in Britain lekking occurs in the morning and evening.

Dominic Sargent

Dr Adam Watson has commented that it is not uncommon for Black Grouse to lek around the middle of the day, especially from late April to early May when the females are fertile and especially if a female is present at the lek. All the grouse species display more vigorously and frequently in early morning and evening, especially dawn and dusk, but can be seen doing so at any time of day.

Late nesting flycatcher

I have a nesting box on the east wall of my house which for many years has been used by Spotted Flycatchers. In exceptional years flycatchers have nested simultaneously on both sides of the house. The first sighting each year has been around 15 May.

This year a single bird was seen on 18 May but a pair was not established in the nesting box until mid June. In due course the pair were seen to be feeding chicks. The poor summer weather with so much rain frequently made conditions very difficult for the birds trying to catch insects for the fledglings.

On 12/13 July there was continuous heavy rain and it was apparent that the parent birds were unable to feed their young. The following day (14 July) I checked the nesting box which had apparently been deserted. There were 4 chicks, all dead. Two were well advanced and feathered, the other 2 being very much retarded and poorly developed. I removed the corpses which at that stage showed no obvious sign of decomposition or scavenging insects.

A few days later a pair of Spotted Flycatchers (the same pair?} took possession of the nesting box and gave every indication that a fresh clutch of eggs was laid. In due course young could be seen being fed and this continued until 23 August when the fledglings left the nesting box.

I have never been aware of more than one brood being raised and the nesting box has always been vacated by early July. It would be interesting to know if the exceptionally poor summer weather has caused other instances of unusual behaviour.

Duncan McDougall

young Spotted Flycatcher John Busby

Short-eared Owl *Don Smtih*

Loch of Mey hide

For several years the members of Caithness SOC have wanted to build a bird hide on the edge of the Loch of Mey because of the wealth of birdlife and the need to reduce conflict between land owners and birdwatch. The loch was recently designated as a Special Protection Area and Ramsar site qualifying for this designation through the wintering populations of Greenland White-fronted Geese, Whooper Swans and a variety of ducks, breeding waterfowl and waders. Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers use the surrounding moorland. Eventually we d access from a local farmer and set about the task of funding the project. This came from a variety of sources (11 in all) including enterprise companies, wildlife groups and local hotels, not forgetting SOC Headquarters. Members of the Caithness SOC and Highland Council Ranger Service provided some of the labour.

By mid July both the hide and disabled access were completed despite some anxious moments due to wet weather and ground conditions and we would like to invite SOC members to make use of the hide. The hide has been called the James MacIntye Gunn Memorial Hide. This is in recognition of one of the founding members of the Caithness Branch of the SOC whose interest in ornithology and natural history goes back to his childhood. Jimmy died on 9 May 1998. The loch is on the north Caithness coast west of the village of Mey. The grid reference of the hide is ND 282738.

We would like to thank the following contributors: *Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, Leader, Scottish Natural Heritage, Fieldfare Trust, SOC HQ, SOC Inverness Branch, East Sutherland Bird Club, RSPB, Northern Studies Group, Highland Council, Castle Arms Hotel (Mey).*

Mary Legg

Whimbrel *David Mitchell*

Unusual display by Hooded Crow

On 7 September 1998 I watched a Hooded Crow on my roof top give a most "discorvid" display. Similar to that by a Herring Gull illustrated in Figure 63c on page 745 of the *Birds of the Western Palearctic* it comprised a jerk of the head forward then downwards until the bill touched the breast, accompanied by a snap of the bill and a low dovelike coo. This it repeated several times before flying off.

A Hooded Crow, probably the same one, has been in the habit recently of roosting on a neighbour's roof, shared by a pair of Herring Gulls, which in the spring displayed in this manner. Is it possibly a case of mimicry in a species not noted for such behaviour?

I have not been able to find any reference to this display in the account of the species in the *Handbook*.

Peter Cunningham

RSPB/SOC Lowland breeding wader survey of mainland Scotland 1997

SOC members may remember the Lowland breeding wader survey undertaken by the RSPB and SOC back in 1992 and 1993. This revealed the importance of Scottish lowland farmland in maintianing a very large proportion of the UK's populations of lowland breeding waders: full details were published in *Scottish Birds* (O'Brien 1996. 18: 231-241). Widespread concern have been expressed about declines in these wader populations since 1992/93, and these led the RSPB and SOC to instigate a repeat survey, of both the random one kilometre squares, and a selection of "key" wader sites in 1997 and 1998.

In 1997, RSPB staff re surveyed 219 random squares in mainland Scotland (which were surveyed in 1992,) and the results from these are presented in Table 1.

These results show that there were no significant changes in the numbers of Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Snipe across mainland Scotland between 1992 and 1997. To be honest, this is surprising news, and is contrary to most people's perceptions of what was going on in their local area. With caution, we can say that this is good news, the declines recorded in England and Wales have not occurred in Scotland. The Scottish lowlands still hold a significant part of the UK population of lowland breeding waders. However, we can see from the table that there is a large amount of between site variation for most wader species (difference between lower and upper 95% confidence limits), so that we may not detect small declines. The declines in Lapwing and Snipe are, however, of concern and we feel it is important to contine to monitor lowland wader populations.

The next steps in the 1997-98 survey are to look at the changes which have occurred at the key sites surveyed by SOC members, to see whether the best sites for birds are holding their own in the way the wider countryside has, and to input and analyse the date for the random squares surveyed in the northern Isles and northern England in 1998. When this is complete, we should have a good picture of the changing prospects of Scotlands' lowalnds waders.

Oystercatcher *John Chapman*

Table 1 ***Wader trends on random squares in Scottish lowlands 1992-1997***

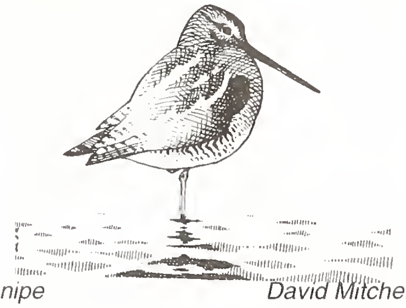
Mainland Scotland 219 sites

	1992	1997	% change	lower 95% con limit	upper 95% con limit
Curlew	305	332	8.85	-3.89	24.14
Lapwing	494.5	429.5	-13.14	-29.71	7.35
Oystercatcher	423	445	5.20	-7.13	19.87
Redshank	29.5	32	8.47	-41.25	100
Snipe	96	77	-19.79	-43.18	13.43

Andy Tharme

Cairngorm Funicular On 27 October 1998

Lord Nimmo-Smith dismissed the petition by WWF/RSPB. The conservation side was disappointed that his opinion went against them on all counts. As this issue of *SBN* went to the printers we learn that WWF/RSPB have decided not to try to take the case any further.



Snipe *David Mitchell*

Congratulations, Donald!

On 28 June this year Donald Watson celebrated his 80th birthday. He and Joan marked the occasion by hosting a very enjoyable party for relatives and friends. To their delight all their 4 children were able to be present – Jeff from the Black Isle, Kate from California, with Pam and Louise up from 'the deep south', plus all the 3 grandchildren.

In his speech Donald's brother Eric recalled how Donald had had a passion for birds from childhood and that by the age of 9 he had begun to draw birds from life, eventually becoming years later a founder member of the Society of Wildlife Artists. Eric also recalled how, when out in the field, Donald had always been totally impervious to the cold and to hunger, and totally oblivious of the time, as some of us can testify! With some thousands of paintings and drawings to his credit, as well as several books on birds, Donald continues to paint to this day.

Whilst still at school Donald became a founder member of the SOC, eventually becoming President of the Club from 1969-1972. He was elected an Honorary Member in 1980 and Honorary Club President in 1986.

At the Stewartry AGM this year the branch members unanimously bestowed upon him the position of Honorary Branch Chairman. Congratulations on your 80th birthday Donald. The Stewartry Branch members hope that you and Joan have many more happy years together watching birds and butterflies, with many more paintings to follow.

Joan Howie

AWSG NW Australia Wader and Tern Expedition 1998

Members of the Highland Ringing Group spent this summer with an Australian Wader Study Group expedition to north west Australia. Ringing (banding) in Australia has its surprises. When we caught 2 Common Redshank on 28 August, some 40 ringers fell about in excitement while the 3 of us from Scotland looked on with mild affection and boredom; after all, Highland Ringing Group regularly catch over half the British total for this species each year. The difference was that the other 40 ringers were Asians or Aussies and the catch was on 80 Mile Beach in NW Australia, a location so remote that not even a vapour trail disturbed the sky.

This expedition was a 13 week project in tropical NW Australia to collect data on waders and terns using the East Asian flyway as they arrived back in Australia for the northern hemisphere winter.

Highland RG and the SOC were well represented with Scots present for all but the initial 2 weeks of the expedition, after an invitation to join them from co-leader Dr Clive Minton. As well as the authors, Henry Robb from Tay RG, Brian and Simon Etheridge and Jacquie Heaton all took part, and the Highland connection was completed by ex Orcadian and Aberdonian, Agnes Gleeson, who looked after the Scottish migrants on passage through Perth with true Scottish hospitality.

The expedition operated from 3 centres: Broome Bird Observatory and Roebuck Bay; 80 Mile Beach - actually nearer 90 where the tide rolls out for at least 2 km and the mud supports a wader density of at least 2000 per km^2; and Port Headland Saltworks. At around 18°south and well inside the Tropic of Capricorn, Roebuck Bay and 80 Mile Beach have the third highest tidal range in the world. The daily temperature ranged from 30 to 38°C during our stay at the end of the Australian winter.

On the bird front, we found ourselves wondering why 80 English twitchers got booked speeding on the A9 for the Burghead Tattler. Our very first catch at 80 Mile Beach netted 11 Tattlers out of 111 birds, with another 45 the next day in a catch of 472 which included 30 Terek Sandpipers. One of these Tereks was also a spectacular success for the expedition: with Korean television filming us, one of the Koreans on the multinational expedition extracted a Korean banded Terek which he had marked himself last September in Korea, an incredible coincidence.

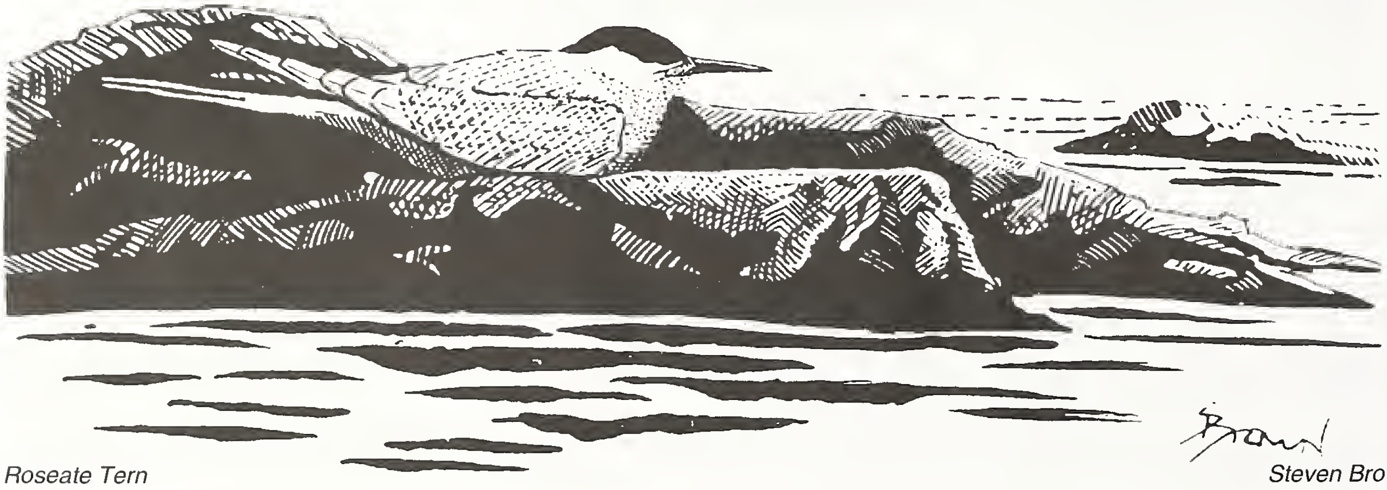
The most astonishing feature for us as Scottish birders was the sheer variety of species taken in each catch. Our largest catch contained 15 wader species, most of which would make a red letter day for any British birder.

One of our most commonly caught and seen waders was Great Knot. When Clive Minton started the NW Australia Expeditions in 1982, the Great Knot was considered a threatened species with an estimated population of 4000 to 6000 individuals. The initial counts at Roebuck Bay and 80 Mile Beach transformed it into one of the most abundant waders in the world at 300k+. The story has been repeated on the current expedition with a discovery which will stagger the members who faithfully guard the Firth of Forth Roseate Terns. Until 1 September it was believed that the total number of Roseate Terns in Australasia was 8000. We chartered a boat for a 2 day trip to the Lacepede Islands off Cape Leveque. Setting aside fantastic views of Humpback Whales breaching and Green Turtles mating, and counting 1200 Lesser Frigatebird nestlings, countless Brown Boobies just fledging, and Common Noddies and Bridled Terns settling down to nest, within 2 hours of landing on West Island we found a non breeding flock of 30,000 Roseate Terns. This represents some 10% of the known world population and immediately triples the known Australasian population.

In 21 days the three of us saw 195 new species, including many endemics, mainly with the expert assistance of fellow expedition member Jonny Schoenjohn who is just establishing as a bird guide in NW Australia. (tel . 61 08 9192 7707 or fax. 7708). In spite of his Teutonic origins he has a great sense of humour and speaks colloquial Scottish exceptionally well after Simon's one to one tuition.

Acknowledgement must be made to Dr Rosalind Jessop, Humphrey Sitters and Clive Minton who organised and led the expedition and without whom we would not have been there, and to the many good friends we made such as Iain and Sandy Stewart, 3 generations ago ex Glen Lyon and now of South Australia, who made it 3 weeks to remember for the rest of us. NWA'98 was breaking new ground daily with the scientific understanding of waders in the East Asian flyways. As for the other birds, the books hardly do them justice. You haven't lived until you've seen a Rainbow Lorikeet in the feather, and you wouldn't believe the colour in Red Backed, Purple Crowned, White Winged Blue or Variegated Fairy Wrens. Even the names are unbelievable.

Simon Foster, Gemma Insley and Hugh Insley somewhere near Singapore 5/9/98



Brown

Roseate Tern

Steven Brown

REVIEWS

***Pittas of the World.** 1998. Edited by Johannes Erritzoe. Lutterworth Press. 240pp. £30 ISBN 0 7188 2961 1.*

This appears to be a thorough review of present knowledge of the 30 species, each receiving at least 4 large double column pages, with many references, including notes of museums having specimens. There is also a 22 page general introduction and 32 colour plates. Essential, but only for those with a serious interest.

John Law

***The Nuthatches** by Erik Matthysen, illustrated by David Quinn. Published by Poyser 1998. £24.95. 315pp. ISBN 0 85661 101 8.*

This new Poyser book on Nuthatches is, as we have come to expect of books from that publisher, a pleasure to pick up and browse through. With numerous line drawings, maps, graphs and photographs spread throughout the text, and chapters of a manageable length for one sitting, the reader is enticed to read further and I quickly found myself absorbed. The line illustrations by David Quinn are excellent and a real asset to the book, as is the colour frontispiece by the same illustrator showing 4 exotic species. The work proves to be well referenced, but the reference to Scotland's birds is already well out of date, as it mentions only the first successful breeding in 1989 (page 159).

Most of the book concentrates on the Eurasian Nuthatch which we find is now a well studied species. Much of the work has been done by the author in his native Belgium. He almost became a snail specialist but chose instead the territorial behaviour of Eurasian Nuthatches for his dissertation subject in 1982. The other 23 species are covered in less detail, but sufficient to encourage birders to travel abroad to seek some of them out. One of them, the Algerian Nuthatch, was not described until 1976 and the tale of its discovery make fascinating reading. This is not an identification book, this being covered by the recent Christopher Helm book, also illustrated by David Quinn.

With the recent spread of 'our' Nuthatch into Scotland, I was keen to read about the dispersal of this species, traditionally thought of as sedentary. In fact young birds move out of their natal territories a few weeks after fledging and there is a second period of dispersal in August and September. Although many birds do not move far, the median dispersal noted is between 3 and 10km, and there have been 17 recoveries of over 100km. As the species requires a minimum of 1ha of good quality (preferably oak) woodland for a territory, and small woodlands must be over 1.5ha with the right tree mix to be colonised, it is not surprising the birds in Borders have now been recorded in widespread locations and now are showing signs of colonising other regions. Nuthatches will use beech woods for mast, but need other mature trees, especially oaks with their high arthropod populations in the rough bark, to establish reasonable population densities.

I recommend this book to everyone interested in woodland birds, there is much to be learnt within its pages.

Mark Holling

***One Season in the Taiga** by Vadim Ryabitsev, translated by G H Harper. 1998. Published by Russian Nature Press, Edinburgh. 179pp. ISBN0-9532990-0-7*

Against the background of concern for the diminishing tropical rain forests, it is easy to forget the Taiga, the vast northern forest of the Eurasian landmass stretching from Scandinavia in the west to the Bering Straits in the east.

The book is the story of this wilderness and is also a splendid description of a scientific study of the comparative ecology of the Willow Warbler and Arctic Warbler, 2 physically similar species with different wintering grounds but overlapping breeding ranges. The methodology is explained in some detail and provides interesting insights into the world of practical field ornithology. The line of research, with its strong emphasis on interspecific territorial behaviour and convergent evolution, is well explained.

The author and his colleague had the luxury of being able to choose a study area virtually unaffected by the impact of man, and settled on the Kozhim river on the western watershed of the Northern Urals, close to the Arctic Circle. Such human habitation as exists is still referred to as 'settlements'.

Interspersed with descriptions of fieldwork, are observations on the myriad insect, bird and animal life, including encounters with Elk and Brown Bear, so that as the book progresses, he skilfully paints a detailed picture of this fascinating northern forest.

The text is well illustrated with drawings by the author, and notes explaining Russian terms and identifying incidental species are grouped at the end of the text. Geoffrey Harper's translation is fluent and natural and adds enormously to the pleasure of reading this fascinating, informative and amusing account of an ornithologist's working season.

As with other natural forests, the Taiga is now increasingly threatened by pollution and commercial activities. This book is a timely reminder of the need to protect this important remaining wilderness.

Jim Mattocks

The book is available by sending a cheque for £10 plus £1 postage and packing (payable to G H Harper) to G H Harper, 19/3 Warriston Road, Edinburgh EH7 4HD

***The Birds of Paradise** by Clifford B Firth and Bruce M Beehler. Oxford 1998. 613pp 15 colour plates £50. ISBN 854 8532*

The first part of this book, another in the Oxford bird Families of the World series, provides a comprehensive and scientifically accurate overview of the biology, ecology and history of the Birds of Paradise group, written so as to be interesting to the lay reader as well as the scientist. The role of the birds of paradise in human culture and tradtion is explored and the final chapter discusses issues of conservation and threats to the survival of these birds. There are many illustrations by William T Cooper and a Foreward by Sir David Attenborough. The book is an authoritative work of reference.

Joan Wilcox

Other books received

***Titmice** and **Owls** both by Keith Graham.*
***Species History in Scotland** by R A Lambert*
***An Inhabited Solitude: Scotland, Land & People**. J McCarthy*

LIBRARY NEWS

The Waterston Library has received substantial grants for binding back runs of many of the journals it holds. The Club is happy to acknowledge the assistance of The British Library through its scheme of grants for cataloguing and preservation, from which 2 payments have been made, and also that of the Russell Trust. The Club has made a comparable contribution from its own Library Fund. All this has enabled us to bind several hundred volumes, many of them in fragile condition, of a variety of British and overseas journals.

REQUESTS

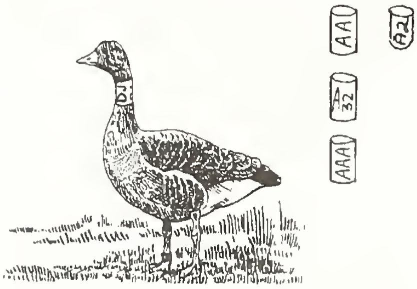
Darvic ringed Oystercatchers
See *SBN* 50

Colour ringed Shags
See *SBN* 50

Breeding origins of Scottish Barnacle Geese - DNA samples required
See *SBN* 51

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329).**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Reed Warblers in Scotland

I am carrying out a review of possible breeding records for Reed Warblers in Scotland. If anyone has any records of a bird/birds in suitable habitat then please get in touch with me. I am particularly interested in hearing of any records in July or August. All contributions will be acknowledged in publication. **Derek Robertson, Woodlands, Bandrum, nr Carnock, Fife KY12 9HR. (01383 852997)**

Photo credit

The photograph of the ornithologists on the Isle of May in the last issue of *SBN* on page 8 was wrongly credited to Keith Brockie. It should have read Bernard Zonfrillo. We apologise to Bernie.

1997 Spring Conference

We would like to apologise to the SOC Clyde branch for ommitting to print a review of this very successful conference.

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:- **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 266362**

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1998 were:

July - 1st £30 N Elkins, Cupar; 2nd £20 A J Smith, Selkirk; 3rd £10 E M Forrester, Ayr.
August – 1st £50 A M Insh, Hamilton; 2nd £30 C McLellan, Peebles; 3rd £20 S M Taylor, St Andrews; 4th £10 G G Sheppard, Stranraer.
September – 1st £30 R D Murray, Eddleston; 2nd £20 P C Wood, Newstead; 3rd £10 K S Macgregor, Edinburgh.

We are nearly there! In response to the note in *SBN 49,* 13 new members joined (or took out a second membership) and at the time of writing (mid-September) we now have 194 members. For the mathematically meticulous, 4 did not renew. We hope to recruit more at the Conference, but if you can help to break the 200 barrier please send me a cheque for £6, payable to "SOC 200 Club", and this will cover the rest of our year. Details of spending in the 200 Club's 10th year will be given in the next *SBN*, but with the increase in membership we can give the SOC more and there will be more prizes. Thank you all for your continued support.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (01896 822176).

Scottish Birds Records Committee election of new member

In 1990 SBRC commenced a rotation with one member new retiring annually. Eric Meek is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Martin Gray, who also lives in Orkney. Martin is an active birder, who in addition to watching birds within the Northern Isle, regularly travels abroad and he has built up a considerable reputation as a finder of rare gulls.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 15 January 1999, being signed by both a proposer and a seconder who must both be SOC members.

If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC local recorders will be eligible to vote.
Ron Forrester, Secretary SBRC, 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

South East Scotland Discussion Group 1998/99

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace at 7.30pm. The dates for 1999 are: January 6; February 3; March 3; April 7; September 1; October 6; November 3; and December 1. All SOC members welcome.

1998 Photographic competition winners

1 Sam Alexander - Adult male Bluethroat at Rattray Head
2 Edmund Fellowes - Adult male Peregrine in south west Scotland
3 Dennis Johnson - young Tawny Owl in Glenmore.

A copy of the winning photograph will appear in the March issue of *SBN* along with the report of yet another successful SOC Conference on Speyside. The 1999 Spring Conference is to be held at The Battleby Centre, Perth and a booking form and programme are enclosed with this mailing.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks to the volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace to assist in sending out the September mailing. They were: Ian Craig, Joan Wilcox, Keith Macgregor, John & Elisabeth Law, Bob & Betty Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Noreen Stabler and John Davies.

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Bird

THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Sylvia Laing and
Joan Wilcox

SMITHSONIAN
APR 20 1999

SOC Conference 1998

The 62nd Annual Conference was again held on Speyside in the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore. 180 members attended the Conference including 94 who stayed at the hotel which was fully booked by the SOC. For those who could not attend as well as those who did but may have missed some of the proceedings – the combined effects of Highland air and alcohol being what they are – Alistair Duncan has provided us with a summary of the weekend.

SOC Photographic Competition winner - adult male Bluethroat *Sam Alexander*

Friday evening

I always know when I'm in Newtonmore by the noise of the Jackdaws. Is anyone working on these birds? Back to the Balavil for the conference. Lovely weekend with superb views of Creag Mor with a dusting of snow skirted by dark green Scots Pines and yellowing Birches. But, to business. The conference got off to a great start on Friday evening. Alan Vittery gave an excellent talk on the birds of Sutherland. He moved up there 8 years ago and had the good fortune to get a house on what he called the Brora bypass. His house is on a major flightline for birds moving south from Scandinavia and Iceland. As a result, at migration time he has thousands of birds such as thrushes passing over and has recorded 18 species of diurnal raptor. He also showed some weather maps illustrating the ideal conditions, occluded fronts, etc which provide ideal conditions for migrants. In all, a talk which I thought was going to be a bit twitchy turned out to be very informative. I don't think anyone won the copy of the book he offered as a prize for correctly guessing the 18 species of diurnal raptor he has recorded in Brora.

Apart from the bar

For the second half of the evening we had a choice, apart from the bar. Stay in the room for the usual slide competition or move through to a session by the History Working Group. On the basis that I have seen many slide competitions over the years, I went to the History Working Group and I am glad I did. The group are engaged in recording the history of the SOC. One of the methods is by interviewing older members of the club for their reminiscences. So if you are over 95 watch out for John Arnott, the Torqeumada of the history group. Most interestingly they had a recording of a talk which the late Maury Meiklejohn gave to the conference at Dunblane in 1968. We listened to about 10 minutes of this and it was just great to hear his vibrant voice recounting anecdotes of famous ornithologists he had known. I found this particularly fascinating as I was at that conference and can recall clearly seeing this great old man sitting on the stage at Dunblane. He just spoke, reminiscing, for about an hour and held the whole audience in the palm of his hand with, as he called it, his anecdotage. I was pleased, of course, to hear later that the slide competition had been won by an Aberdeen member, Sam Alexander. Well done, Sam.

Saturday morning

On Saturday morning Colin Galbraith started the programme with a talk on what SNH does for birds. Among other things he covered the current thorny issue of birds of prey, pointing out that SNH has just issued a publication recommending measures to be taken in managing grouse moors (see page 8). This is in the wake of the Langholm Project. It will be interesting to see how this is received by the grouse moor managers.

Roger Broad gave a history of the Sea Eagle introduction project. He showed how, following the initial introductions, the state of play by the late eighties was that there were too few breeding adults surviving to sustain the project. Consequently, in 1993 a second phase of introductions was started. Is the Sea Eagle established and likely to increase in Scotland now? We cannot be sure. Currently there are 12 territory holding pairs after 24 years of introductions. However, the number of young fledged each year is increasing slowly so we must be optimistic.

Ian Bainbridge stood in for Mark Hancock and spoke on the results of the recent winter Farmland Survey. He covered the winter distribution of Red List passerines, eg Skylark and Corn Bunting, and how these species utilised farmland in winter.

Interesting for me was the fact that north east Scotland holds more of these birds per square than other areas of Scotland. Results showed that stubble fields and neep fields are important for these birds. Indeed weedy neep fields are best and hold 5 times as many birds as other fields. Not sure what this says about fields in the north east!

Hugh Insley described his Common Gull work. He monitors 3 colonies, following clutches from laying to fledging. He lost virtually a whole colony to Mink and almost lost another to egg collecting. When Hugh challenged the person he saw picking up the eggs, he said he was intending making an omelette. High pointed out that, as the birds are a protected species, the omelette would cost about £6000 in fines! The eggs were put back.

Andy Tharme wound up the session. He is the only speaker I have known whose age was given in the introduction. He is very young. He spoke on the repeat of the Lowland Breeding Wader Survey. Essentially this showed that the populations of some waders, such as Oystercatchers, have gone up, and some like Lapwings have gone down. These changes appear, in part at least, to be due to changes in farming practice. Less grazing, for instance, leads to less waders.

Afternoon

The late afternoon session was started off by Malcolm Ogilvie. Is there a problem with geese and farming? Malcolm gave an emphatic yes. He would give us some reasons but no solutions.

Geese have been seen as a problem for a long time and we were given a quote from Harvie-Brown and Buckley (1892) to this effect. Geese have always wintered in Scotland but their numbers have greatly increased due firstly to changes in land use, ie more land cleared and more crops, and secondly, the effectiveness of protection measures both here and on the breeding grounds. Counts of Pink-feet, organised by Slimbridge from 1952, show that numbers remained fairly low and stable until 1984 when the dramatic increase started - just when Malcolm, who organised the counts, left. Damage to farmland, direct and indirect, can be clearly seen. Solutions have included scaring, which has to be sustained and constantly changed; payments, which are expensive; sacrificial crops, used at Strathbeg. Malcolm suggested ecotourism, but goose numbers are a problem we will have to tackle.

at Thomson is a most enthusiastic speaker and spoke next on the Flow Country. The RSPB bought Forsinard in the flow country "the middle of nowhere, in Scotland, which is at the edge of nowhere". It was realised that the trees planted there were quite inappropriate so they have been felled, all the drains dug over the years have been blocked to restore the flooding, some paths have been made to allow limited access and cameras have been set up at Hen Harrier nests and the pictures beamed to the visitor centre. It certainly sounds a great place to visit, especially on International Bog Day which is held every year!

Greenshank *RSPB*

The Dinner

The Annual Dinner is not such a formal affair as it used to be. Malcolm Ogilvie was called on to entertain us and toast the club. As usual he was excellent. His bird jokes were of the Christmas cracker variety but were meant to be. I don't know what Malcolm's politics are but the leaked document he described to us where it was proposed that all the RSPB's funds in Scotland are to be sequestered and given to the SOC along with their Scottish membership, was sufficient incentive to push my vote in a particular direction!

Sunday

On Sunday morning Hugh Clark spoke on his Twite study. As a ringer, I had heard of Hugh Clark but nobody told me he was such an amusing speaker. As for the Twite, Hugh has ringed about 900 and had 4 recoveries. I hand it to him for sheer doggedness. In sum, Twite like weedy neep fields (remember them) where they feed on the Charlock. The paucity of recoveries means that Hugh is still not clear where they come from although he suspects a Scandinavian connection.

Paul Thomson spoke on the seals and whales of the Moray Firth. The seals are radio tagged to look at their movements and their faeces are collected, also to look at their movements *(author's pun not ours, Eds)*. They eat mainly Sand Eels (doesn't everything) followed by Octopus and Squid. The Firth holds about 130 Bottle-nosed Dolphins and following those with recognisable marks has revealed that they are not sedentary but move up and down the coast between the Moray Firth and the Fife coast.

Richard Evans followed on the importance of the Moray Firth for waterfowl. The Moray Firth is the most northerly estuary in the UK and holds significant numbers of wildfowl. For example, in winter it holds 69% of the UK population of Red-breasted Merganser and 4% of the European population of Redshank. This area is obviously well worth looking after and there are some threats. The oil industry has not been a problem, so far, but habitat loss, eg at Longman, has been.

Bob Swann talked on Greylag Geese: site faithful or not? Bob said that they, Highland Ringing Group, decided to work on Greylags because they were largely neglected, "farmyard things which no one is interested in". Since 1992 HRG have caught and ringed 1600, fitted neck collars on many of them and dyed their rear ends yellow. One shooter thought he had shot a species new to science! The results of the study show that these birds are not at all site faithful. Although Greylags may always be present in an area there are different birds moving through all the time.

The last speaker was Brian Etheridge who outlined the Red Kite reintroduction programme. Despite the deaths of some birds due to poisoning, this has been a success story. By the year 2015 it is estimated that the population will be about 1000 allowing about 20 Scottish bred birds per year to be reintroduced elsewhere in the UK.

I found this to be a most enjoyable conference even though I had to attend all the talks, stay awake and take notes. A friend confided that he had not been "favourably taken" by the programme beforehand but he had really enjoyed the conference and will be back next year. So will I.

Alistair Duncan

Mixed fortunes for Corncrakes

The Corncrake, one of Britain's most threatened birds, has had a year of mixed fortunes, This summer saw the fourth full census of Corncrakes in Britain, combined with the annual monitoring of numbers in the core area on Scottish islands. The population of calling male Corncrakes in Britain increased by 23%, from 480 to 589, since the last full census in 1993. The increase was widely spread, with most Scottish island groups, the mainland of Scotland and England showing increases.

Previous surveys of Corncrakes have shown a continuing decline. Numbers declined by 17% between 1988 and 1993. This welcome change in population trends coincides with a period in which special conservation measures have been applied to increase the survival and breeding success of Corncrakes.

However, the good news has to be balanced against a decline by 15% since 1997 in monitored core Scottish areas. Areas showing declines compared with 1997 were Lewis (down 33%), Barra (down 37%) and Skye (down 48%). However, there were increases in Corncrakes on Colonsay, Oronsay and Iona, and the species returned to the islands of Canna and Mull for the first time since 1994. The National Trust of Scotland who manage Canna and Iona have made progress with Corncrake management and the birds have responded. Numbers showed little change in several other areas, including the strongholds of Tiree and the Uists, so the overall picture for the population remains optimistic.

Ayrshire Branch in action

This account of efforts to protect an important habitat is of interest in itself and also a good example of how to go about defending a site.

There is currently a proposal to create a landraise waste disposal development at the Bogside Flats in Irvine. The development would entail access road extension, a new bridge across the Garnock, flood defence reinforcement, a leachate treatment plant with an outflow into the estuary and sand quarry. This development would handle a range of material including industrial waste, soils, rubble and garden waste. It is expected that organic waste would be included. The landraise would operate for 25 years. It would be adjacent to the Garnock Estuary, and would partly enclose an area of pools, scrub and wetland on the Flats. The development is proposed for an area adjacent to, and upstream of a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Bogside Flats is the only extensive expanse of saltmarsh and mudflats between the Clyde and the Solway. The saltmarsh is the best example of this habitat in Ayrshire.

Ornithological importance

The Bogside area is important for breeding, wintering and migrating populations. Although the Water Rail is notoriously difficult to census, this is the species of most concern. The British population was estimated in 1993 to be 450–900 pairs. This means that the 13 or so pairs at Bogside may represent 2% of the British population.

Water Rail *P J Newman*

About 45 other species of birds breed on the site, including 5 red listed and 10 amber listed species. The numbers of breeding pairs of Moorhen, Reed Bunting, Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers, Whitethroat and Snipe are also important in an Ayrshire context. Although just outside the proposed development site, the heronry on the Ardeer Peninsular could also be subject of disturbance. This is much the largest colony of Grey Heron in Ayrshire, comprising nearly half of the known nests in the county. Because of their position at the top of the aquatic food chain, Herons would also be especially at risk from toxic chemicals if leachate from the site escaped into the River Garnock. The tidal mud flats on the Garnock are the most important example of this habitat between the Clyde and the Solway. The flats could be threatened by pollution from leachate from the landraise and possibly by hydrological changes resulting from the new access bridge.

Wetland bird surveys in the area have shown that counts of both Lapwing and Golden Plover can exceed 1000 birds. Other waders whose counts can reach several hundred are Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Curlew, Redshank and Turnstone. Because some of these species are mainly present as passage migrants, individual birds may only be in an area for a short period. Thus the total number of individuals actually using the area may be several times greater than the highest one day count. WeBS counts of wintering wildfowl show that numbers of Wigeon, Teal, Mallard and Eider in the area normally reach several hundreds. Concentrations of Red-breasted Merganser often approach 100.

Other concerns

Conservationists are also concerned over the risks to local ecosystems posed by dust from dumping operations and the possibility of untreated leachate escaping from the landraise site. During the 25 years it will take to fill the landraise on this rather windy site, a large amount of dust is bound to be released into the surrounding area and will settle on soils, water and the mud flats as well as contaminating vegetation. Although it is planned to collect and treat all the leachate from the landraise, the nature of the site makes it doubtful whether this can be done reliably. The proposal also refers to the possibility of having to 'polish' the effluent after primary treatment by the use of reed beds. The fact that reedbed treatment may or may not be necessary suggests that there is uncertainty about the nature and treatability of the leachate.

The location and nature of the site also leads to doubts about the reliability of leachate containment. There are extensive old mine workings under the site. With a million tonnes of waste to be dumped over the 25 year period there must be a significant risk of a collapse in these old mine workings leading to leakage of untreated leachate into groundwater. Another concern over leachate arises from the proximity of the site to the High Tide Line. We appear to be entering a period of unpredictable weather and there are predictions that sea levels could rise due to global warming. In these circumstances low level coastal sites such as this are not suitable for waste disposal.

Coalition

A meeting was held at Lochwinnoch on 28 July at which Duncan Orr-Ewing of the RSPB gave a presentation to several local conservation groups. All present expressed opposition to the proposals. It was agreed to form a loose coalition of parties opposed to the development.

The aims of the coalition are that the landraise site should be established as a Local Nature Reserve. A strategic plan for the conservation and promotion of the estuary should be developed by North Ayrshire Council.

Protest methods

Letters of concern can be of great assistance in the current political climate.
Key points included
Why were the public not consulted over a change in waste management strategy?
Why does North Ayrshire have no Waste Management Strategy?

The meeting agreed that it would be valuable if as many people as possible wrote letters to:
Their local MP perhaps requesting that he question the Secretary of State for Scotland
The Secretary of State for Scotland
Local councillors, for people who live in the area
The Planning Department of North Ayrshire Council
The Chief Executive, NAC.

To prevent letters receiving only standard replies and therefore having little impact always ask a question. These can be about any aspect that interests the writer. For example: "I don't think correct procedure has been followed. Can you tell me what the correct procedure is?" Also be positive and recommend that the site should be given Listed Wildlife Sites and possibly SSSI status. Stress that careful development to provide access to the site with minimal disturbance to wildlife could provide recreation for local people and an excellent educational resource for future generations of school children.

Public awareness

To raise awareness of the value of the site RSPB organised a 'showing people birds' event in January. Local birders were encouraged to help others see the birds and stress the issues involved.

Outcome

The proposals were sent to the Scottish Office several months ago but the hearing has been postponed about 4 times. A further hearing is due to take place in March.

Licences to shoot Barnacle Geese on Islay challenged

The RSPB and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have challenged the Scottish Office decision to issue licences to kill and scare Barnacle Geese within Special Protection Areas refuge zones on Islay. The 2 organisations have decided to take legal action to stop these licences because they believe they contravene EU law. This situation has arisen because SNH has decided not to continue special payments to farmers in these SPAs, which were established to protect geese on Islay. This leaves the farmers with the choice of either accepting lower payments under the Islay Voluntary Goose Management Scheme which provides £10 per goose to farmers, or applying for the licences to shoot the geese. Six farmers applied to the Scottish Office for licences and on 27 November 1998 2 were granted and 4 refused. A temporary suspension of the licences was granted to RSPB and WWT in the Edinburgh Court of Session in December prior to a full hearing in February, after the licences will have expired. The licences were therefore not used and no geese were shot.

Both the RSPB and WWT emphasise that their quarrel is not with the farmers concerned. Stuart Housden, Director RSPB Scotland, said: "We sympathise with the farmers, but we believe that issuing these licences will not solve the problem. The Government's own National Goose Forum was well on the way towards reaching a consensus on how to manage goose problems across Scotland. The status quo should have been maintained, to allow the Forum to complete its work. We do not believe it is lawful or rational to license the killing of protected geese inside areas specially established to protect them.

One of the licensed areas is, we understand, adjacent to the RSPB reserve at Loch Gruinart. Visitors to this reserve also inject £346,000 per year into the Islay economy. Scaring and shooting alongside the reserve will disturb most of the geese, which is what most visitors come to see."

Barnacle Geese *Bobby Smith*

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Stan da Prato*

Capercaillie strike a chord for the Horse of the Woods

The tenth year of management at the RSPB's Abernethy Forest Nature Reserve saw the removal of the last 100 metres of deer fence with the help of Karen Matheson and Donald Shaw of the well known band Capercaillie and local children.

During the last 25 years the Scottish population of Capercaillie, whose name originates in the Gaelic Capull coille or horse of the woods, apparently due to the last part of the male's display call resembling the neigh of a horse, has declined dramatically. The latest survey conducted between 1992-94 gave a population estimate of only 2,200 birds. Concern for the species survival has resulted in a voluntary shooting ban. One of the main reasons for the decline is that birds collide with deer fences. During the last 10 years the RSPB has been removing all the fences from the forest.

In many forests, deer fences can cause serious problems for some birds with up to 32% of Black Grouse and Capercaillie killed each year. In addition to removing fences the RSPB is working closely with forest managers and other conservation bodies on experimental grouse friendly fences. The idea behind such fences is that they will keep deer out but significantly reduce bird strikes for example by adding markers to the fence to make them more visible.

Several other factors are responsible for the demise of this_bird. Fragmentation of habitat and poor breeding success have led to insufficient chicks being reared. Wet summers have also resulted in very few Capercaillie chicks surviving. While forest managers and conservationists have no influence over the weather, the problem of fence strikes is one which can certainly be tackled.

Females top the pecking order in gull survival

In a study whose initial results have fascinated the media, scientists at Glasgow University have discovered that Lesser Black-backed Gulls are producing a new breed of female "superchicks" because the males are not tough enough to survive. After studying the Lesser Black-backed Gulls on an island off the Cumbrian coast the Department of Environmental and Evolutionary Biology concluded that starving gulls are more likely to produce female chicks because they are easier to look after and more resilient. Male gulls are less likely to survive under extreme conditions and, therefore, more difficult to rear.

Team leader Dr Richard Griffiths, said "It appears that female gulls are subconsciously influencing the sex of their offspring because they don't trust male chicks' ability to survive in the wild. To date it had been thought that sex selection was an entirely random business, this indicates this is not the case."

Scientists on Walney removed recently laid eggs, which were then replaced by the gulls. They found that, by giving extra food to the gulls to help them cope with the strain of laying replacements, they ensured a 50/50 ratio of female births to males. However, others who were denied extra food remained undernourished and were found to be 80% more likely to give birth to a female chick.

The commercial implications of the find are huge and chicken farmers are studying the findings closely. Chicken farmers require only females for egg production and kill male chicks. If developed, the findings of the Glasgow team could potentially end the killing of males.

Despite the breakthrough no one can explain fully why the ratio of female births increased under stressful conditions.

Charles Frank

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Red Kites nest in central Scotland

Following their extermination by man at the end of the nineteenth century, Red Kites have been reintroduced to Northern Scotland from Sweden since 1989 and to central Scotland from Germany since 1996. They began nesting in Northern Scotland in 1992, and in 1998 20 pairs raised 44 young there. During 1998 Red Kites nested in Central Scotland for the first time this century.

Two pairs of kites raised a total of 5 young in Central Scotland in 1998, a significant step towards restoring these birds to their original natural range. Before long their aerobatic flight should soon become familiar to people throughout Scotland.

Red Kites pose no threat to farming or sporting interests, their principal food being Rabbits. Birds carry wing tags, and any sightings of these should be reported to the **RSPB Glasgow office on 0141 945 5224.**

Dunblane Buzzards poisoned

Three Buzzards found poisoned near Dunblane are the subject of continuing enquiries by the Police and Scottish Agriculture Department officials. Tests have revealed that all 3 birds were victims of the illegally used poison Alphachloralose, one of the most frequently used poisons against birds of prey. All the birds were found over a 6 day period close to the same woodland in mid November. Two of the Buzzards died as a result of ingesting the poison while a third, found alive but very ill, is currently in veterinary care.

Scotland experiences a disproportionate amount of illegal poisoning compared to the rest of the UK and 1998 has been a particularly bad year. The RSPB is so far aware of 21 Buzzards killed in 13 separate poisoning incidents. In addition 4 Red Kites, 2 Peregrines, 2 Golden Eagles and a Hen Harrier have also died as a result of illegally used poisons.

These crimes often go undetected and identifying those responsible is extremely difficult. Only one successful prosecution had resulted so far in 1998 when a gamekeeper on Cabrach Estate in Grampian was convicted for having a poisoned Peregrine and a container of poison in his possession.

Peregrine with chicks *Jim Young*

SOC member disowned

A Dutch member has been struck off the SOC membership list following his conviction in January at Inverness Sheriff Court. Wilhelmus Enzlin was fined £2000, which was to be paid from existing bail money of £3000. He also had his vehicle and £4000 in cash seized at the time of his arrest in May 1998, after admitting trying to purchase 16 Scottish wild bred Peregrine chicks. The court heard how Enzlin had written to 2 men at Brora and Aviemore and had arranged a meeting to purchase the birds. When no birds were produced the accused realised he had walked into a trap set by Scottish and Dutch police along with RSPB investigators. This is the first case of this kind in Scotland under the COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species) Regulations 1997.

Dave Dick the RSPB's investigations officer in Scotland added "Every year Peregrine nests in Scotland are robbed of eggs and young to supply the illegal falconry trade. A successful prosecution, such as this case under COTES, is an important deterrent to those involved and a tremendous boost for the many people who protect Peregrine sites throughout Scotland".

Stolen Scottish birds fly home

Two young Peregrines stolen as eggs from a nest in the North of Scotland last May have been brought back to Scotland. Work by German Customs officials in Cologne and RSPB revealed that these birds are part of the illegal international trade in wild birds for falconry. Scottish wild born Peregrines are highly prized for falconry and previous cases involving smuggled eggs and chicks sold to German nationals suggest that they may have a value of over £1000 per bird. DNA testing of these birds in Germany revealed that they had been falsely registered as captive bred. Two people are currently under investigation in Germany and enquiries are continuing to identify others who may be involved.

Dave Dick, of RSPB, has called for stronger penalties to protect Scottish wildlife: "The advances in the use of DNA testing are helping to detect stolen birds, but stronger penalties including custodial sentences must be introduced to help eliminate the trade in Scottish wild birds. If found guilty in Germany those involved face up to 5 years in prison and unlimited fines. This is in sharp contrast to the current maximum fine of £5,000 allowed under the British Wildlife and Countryside Act." Although relatively few nest robberies of birds of prey were detected in 1998, a proven demand for Scottish wild born birds is a serious and continuing risk to the wild population. Valuable work by the Raptor Study Groups helps monitor these birds in areas of high risk. They are supported by a network of specially trained Police Wildlife Liaison Officers.

After arriving at Edinburgh Airport, courtesy of a UPS flight, these birds were transferred to the Highland Wildlife Park, Kingussie, who will house the birds during assessments to determine if they can be released or are too tame.

Unusual Carrion Crow behaviour

Reading Peter Cunningham's account of 'discorvid' behaviour (*SBN* Dec '98 – *Unusual display by Hooded Crow)* brought to mind an incident involving a Carrion Crow perched atop a neighbour's TV aerial in Melrose early one July morning last year. It performed this same behaviour 3 or 4 times before it grew uneasy at my open mouthed stare and flew off. No Herring Gulls frequent our small village so the source of this behaviour is even more mysterious.

Timothy Chamberlain

Ythan fails to gain protection

The Ythan Estuary, Aberdeenshire, supports internationally important numbers of breeding Sandwich Terns and wintering Pink-footed Geese, together with important numbers of breeding Eiders, Common and Little Terns and wintering Eiders and Redshanks. The Ythan catchment area is over 68,000 hectares of which 95% is under intensive farmland. However, the Scottish Office has failed to designate the Ythan Estuary as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) opting instead to continue researching the impacts of nitrate pollution on the area.

Nitrate pollution in the Ythan is evident by the dense and widespread growth of the fast growing weed *Enteromorpha* which blankets the mudflats in the spring and summer. The growth of these algal mats has in turn reduced the number of shrimp like *Corophium,* which is the primary food source for many of the fish and wading birds living in the estuary. Compared to other North East Rivers the Ythan has a high concentration of nitrate discharging into the estuary (30-40 milligrams per litre) and over the last 30 years the winter concentrations of nitrates have seen a 3-fold increase.

Despite the fact that 30 years of scientific research has provided strong evidence of nitrate pollution, primarily from agriculture, Lord Sewel, the Scottish Office Agriculture Minister, has said "Existing evidence on whether the Ythan estuary is subject to eutrophication (the enrichment of water by nitrogen compounds) is still not conclusive and so I have decided, for the moment, not to designate the Ythan catchment as a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone.

Are St Kilda Puffins again under stress?

St Kilda once had one of the world's largest Puffin colonies. By the time of Operation Seafarer in 1969, it appeared that numbers were greatly reduced, but even so there were probably 300,000 pairs. In the 1970s Mike Harris (ITE) conducted a detailed study into Puffins on St Kilda and concluded that the decline had ceased and that it had probably been caused by changes in oceanographic conditions adversely influencing the birds' food supply.

Although St Kilda has many attractions it is an extremely difficult place on which to carry out scientific study due to its isolation, adverse weather and the rugged terrain. However, directly opposite and one mile from the island of Dun, with its 40,000 pairs of Puffins, is a thriving army camp. At fledging, young Puffins are attracted to lights and low frequency sounds such as generator engines and juveniles from Dun are regularly found around the camp. Since 1973 most individuals have been collected and usually (7727 birds) weighed before release. In a recent paper in *Bird Study* (45:37-374), Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless of ITE and Stuart Murray (NTS/SNH) report on an analysis of these weights.

There was a significant decline in annual fledgling weights between 1973 and 1976, such that at the end of the study juveniles were, on average, 15% lighter than at the start. There were 4 particularly bad years (1985, 1989, 1993 and 1996) when juveniles were exceptionally thin with average weights of less than 200g which compares with 250–270 in good years. The authors, helped by other NTS/SNH wardens, were able to measure breeding success directly by regularly checking burrows on Dun in 10 years. There was a highly significant positive relationship between breeding success and the weight of the juveniles caught at the camp on Hirta. Thus, breeding success appears to have also declined over the period. Despite many years field work on Puffins there is still no direct evidence that survival after fledging is related to weight at fledging at either the individual or the annual level. However, it would not be unexpected if in years when fledgling weights were very low few young survive to join the population subsequently. In summary, it appears as though Puffins on St Kilda are now rearing fewer, and lighter, chicks than they did 20-30 years ago. At least in part, current poor breeding seems to be associated with warmer sea conditions in the pre breeding period. Global warming may not be to the liking of *Fratercula arctica.* It will be interesting how many Puffins Seabird 2000 finds on Dun.

Mike Harris

Puffins *Bobby Smith*

Grouse moor management

The Moorland Working Group (MWG) was established by Scottish Natural Heritage in November 1997 to develop moorland management proposals for grouse moors in Scotland. It has members from the Buccleuch Estates, Game Conservancy Trust, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scottish Grouse Research Trust, Scottish Landowners' Federation, the Scottish Office and SNH. It has now made recommendations in a booklet Good Practice for Grouse Moor Management, which has been sent to the Government and its agencies, major grouse moor estates in Scotland and all representative bodies dealing with grouse moors.

The Working Group recognises the importance of well managed grouse moors in Scotland. These areas support an internationally important array of habitats, invertebrates and birds. There are wider scenic and amenity values associated with these moors, which are part of the beauty of Scotland. There has been a long tradition of management of grouse moors. Provided grouse moors are actively managed they should sustain many jobs in rural areas which are largely unsubsidised by the public purse.

Broad principles

The MWG wishes to see improvements in the overall standards of moorland management, mainly on areas managed for sheep and deer, but also over the land which is managed for Red Grouse. Almost a quarter of Scotland's Heather has been lost since the 1940s, with most of this loss attributed to forestry and agricultural intensification, particularly heavy grazing and lack of active shepherding. Too much of the remaining Heather dominated land is heavily grazed and/or poorly burned. As a result, the natural productivity of the land is reduced and its biodiversity and amenity diminished. It will take a long period of sustained effort to restore the quality of our moorland.

Management

The MWG acknowledges the importance of targeted rotational burning to maintain a diversity of Heather cover. The first priority is to burn a sufficient amount of land to encourage a mixture of young, intermediate and mature Heather. Burning in large strips is best to break up large uniform areas which have not been burned for a long time. Small patch burning is the second priority and should be applied so that all of the moor is burned within a 15-20 year period.

Certain areas should not be burned because of serious fire hazards or the sensitivity of particular habitats, notably wind clipped Heather on exposed summits and ridges, steep slopes and very broken ground where fires would be difficult to control and damp ground. Areas of Juniper and other scrub are very sensitive to burning, though fires can be used to encourage good seedbed conditions to help regeneration. A few of the tallest patches of Heather, which provide nesting cover for Merlins and Hen Harriers, should be left as should areas close to regenerating woodland or to other fire risks.

Red Grouse *William Brotherston*

Cutting is an alternative to burning and is not weather dependent. A tractor can cut 3-4 hectares per day. Cutting with a flail or swipe may be used where burning is difficult or dangerous. It is, however, slower and more expensive than burning.

The Government has announced the merger of the Countryside Premium Scheme (CPS) and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in Scotland, and that a new scheme will be launched in the spring of 2000.

The MWG recommends funding under CPS/ESAs and the merged scheme for muirburn or cutting where appropriate to support grouse moor management. Well practised grouse moor management requires a large number of fires and this needs a heavy labour input. Advancement of the start of the burning season from 1 October to 1 September to extend the amount of time available for sensitive muirburn is recommended.

Shepherds

It is desirable to have active shepherding of sheep on moorland areas. However, this is not essential if there is a good burning regime and the numbers of sheep are not high and they are appropriately distributed. Sheep can account for heavy losses of Heather on the lower reaches of moorland estates, particularly around areas where food is provided in winter. Feeding stations should be moved at least 250 metres every 3 weeks.

Both sheep and grouse take Heather shoot tips which also provide important food for insects which are in turn an important food for Red Grouse and Black Grouse chicks. Not more than 40% of the Heather's yearly growth should be removed by grazing animals.

Appropriate densities of sheep benefit grouse moors by helping to maintain a diversity of dwarf shrub vegetation. Over winter feeding on grassland rather than on moorland and the use of sheds for shelter reduce sheep impacts on Heather.

The MWG recommends incentives to encourage reductions in sheep densities, increased funding for fencing to contain and manage sheep around moorland edges, increased funding for active shepherding, support for farmers who take ewes from moorland areas to be over wintered on grasslands (eg contributions to transport and rental costs) and support for the construction of sheds so that farmers can inwinter their sheep.

Integrated deer management

The MWG supports the Deer Commission for Scotland in its efforts to reduce the impacts of Red and Sika Deer. The MWG recognises that deer numbers remain so high on some grouse moors that dwarf shrub losses occur. Furthermore, the risks of tick borne diseases in grouse can be high in places where there are large numbers of deer in summer.

Predator control

Legal predator control may benefit many upland birds. Fox and crow control is considered to be important and is regarded as an integral part of grouse moor management. The RSPB and GCT are researching this issue. There are various well established legal means for the humane control of predator, eg Larsen Traps and free running snares.

Managing and protecting raptors

The MWG wants to see the cessation of all illegal persecution of birds and mammals. Several new methods are currently being tested to mitigate the impacts of birds of prey on Red Grouse stocks. An initial trial at Langholm, using alternative dead prey for Hen Harriers, has reduced the impact of harriers on Red Grouse numbers, particularly in late spring and summer. The wider applicability of this trial has yet to be tested. Provided that these alternative prey are supplied without disturbing harriers at the nest and provided that any prey remaining are disposed of, the practice is legal. An SNH guide to this practice is being produced.

Some grouse moor managers put out dovecots to provide alternative food for Peregrines. The effect of this technique on grouse bags has not yet been scientifically tested. The MWG and 9 supporting organisations have jointly pledged to "oppose all illegal practices, not least the persecution of birds of prey, and encourage adherence to wildlife and countryside legislation".

Tick and disease control

Sheep, deer and hares are significant hosts for sheep ticks which transmit various virus diseases, notably Louping Ill from which up to 80% of infected grouse chicks die. Heavy grazing by sheep and deer can result in the replacement of Heather by an unpalatable, thick grassy layer which harbours more ticks and therefore increases the transmission of the virus to grouse. Moorland managers are urged to discuss with shepherds how they vaccinate against Louping Ill and to obtain veterinary advice. If sheep are regularly dipped, their presence on the hill can be beneficial in lowering tick numbers.

The Strongyle Worm is the other significant cause of disease in grouse. This worm is a major cause of population cycles in grouse and can cause regular and large scale reductions in grouse numbers. Grouse can be dosed directly prior to breeding or indirectly by applying medicated grit.

Bracken control

Bracken control on grouse moors is necessary to safeguard other more valuable habitats which may be shaded out or swamped by its litter. Control is also needed to safeguard valuable grazing and to reduce the displacement of sheep and deer onto more valuable and vulnerable habitats, to facilitate shepherding and gathering and to reduce the risk of certain diseases. However, Bracken on the grassy fringes of moorland can support a distinctive range of nesting bird species.

There are 2 main approaches to the control of Bracken. Physical control involves the cutting or crushing of growing fronds so that the surviving rhizomes are gradually starved. Cutting should be done for at least 3 successive years. The other method of control requires treatment with Asulam or Glyphosate. Asulam is preferable, being more specific, and is best applied in mid July/late August, preferably during a dry period.

Other habitats

Scrub and native woodland add to the diversity of habitats on an estate and make a significant contribution to the complement of plants, birds and other animals. There is scope for diversifying game interests, for example by encouraging Black Grouse. Such habitat creation around the grouse moor edge should result in more prey being available throughout spring and summer to divert birds of prey from grouse.

Wet flushes are vital feeding areas for waders and grouse, particularly for young chicks. Established drains on moors can be blocked to create additional pools or wet areas. It is important not to damage existing flushes as these are much used by grouse broods.

Heather restoration and regeneration

The restoration of Heather from grassy areas from which it has been lost is important; however, it is much more cost effective to prevent its loss in the first place. Where no Heather seed bank remains, seed needs to be collected and introduced. Forestry, hill farming and other agricultural and amenity interests can influence adjoining grouse moor interests. Moorland managers should have careful regard for these, notably the impacts of forestry on muirburn and pest control programmes.

Good Practice for Grouse Moor Management – a publication from the Moorland Working Group, c/o SNH, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh EH6 5NP

Aggressive display by Blackcock *Bobby Smith*

The Cairngorms in the 1950s

The whole point about bird watching is to go out and enjoy seeing wild birds. However, as time passes these transient experiences if written down can convey a useful picture particularly for those who were not there at the time. A good example of this is John Burton's account of a youthful expedition to Speyside over 40 years ago.

It was Harold Lapworth, Nuneaton Bird Club's first secretary, who inspired me to keep a birdwatching notebook. Harold, a pragmatist by profession, was a meticulous notetaker, and at the conclusion of every field meeting he made sure that time was available for us to discuss our sightings and compile a species list.

Later, when I joined the Junior Bird Recorder's Club, known today as the YOC, recording was paramount. Four times a year members received recording sheets and the resulting JBRC Annual Report might even contain some records followed by your initials. I still have my notebooks, and for me they represent a mixture of interesting, nostalgic and at times bizarre reading. An early entry gives details of a male Black Redstart perched on the roof of the school gym. Another records details of a visit to Overstrand in Norfolk to see Britain's first Collared Doves. In view of their subsequent increase, perhaps I should have saved my money.

Recently, I came across details of a visit to the Cairngorms made in the 1950s, and this set me thinking how Aviemore and the Cairngorms have changed since the building of the Aviemore Centre.

Another world

In those days, to an English birdwatcher, the Cairngorms represented another world; a place where Dotterel, Golden Eagle and Crested Tit could be found, the place for a once in a lifetime visit. So it was with a great sense of anticipation that after 12 months' hard saving, 3 teenagers, Trevor Collett, John Wagstaff and myself, boarded the overnight London to Inverness train at Nuneaton bound for Aviemore. At 10 o'clock the following morning we were standing in the rain on Aviemore station but within 15 minutes, we had our first Crested Tits. The few hotels in Aviemore were completely outwith our price range, but Mrs Stephens at Craiggowrie Guest House offered full board for 4 guineas a week. Despite having virtually no sleep during the journey, we dumped our bags in Craiggowrie, collected our hire bikes and cycled off into the rain.

Two young Crossbills, bills not yet crossed *Bobby Smith*

Capercaillie was high on our wanted list, and it was not difficult *(changed days, indeed, Ed)*. Climbing over the wall where the Centre now stands and walking up into the forest, we soon flushed 2 females, but the day ended on a sour note when we came upon the remains of another female caught in a gin trap. We found other Capercaillie at Blackpark and Whitewall.

Mrs Stephens was the sort of landlady who stood no nonsense, although she did make clothes drying facilities available, which we used daily. The food was plain and the portions minuscule, so much so that we were forced to hang back after breakfast in the hope of collecting the odd roll or slice of toast left behind by the other guests. The daily packed lunch was predictable, one scone and 3 rhubarb jam sandwiches. We fantasised that the shelves of the pantry groaned under the weight of hundreds of pots of rhubarb jam of different vintages.

Where the River Druie flows into the Spey there was a marshy field, which I think is a fish farm today. Here, we estimated were up to 3 pairs of Corncrake and, with the aid of notched rib bones, we were able to lure the birds to within a few feet *(note this would now be illegal without a licence)*.

Unforgetable

Our first visit to Loch Morlich was unforgettable. Just offshore swam 9 Common Scoters (3 males and 6 females according to my notebook). A pair of Greenshanks was displaying by the inlet. On the far side, perched on a dead tree, was an Osprey which was joined after a short time by a second. Later in the holiday we watched one of these birds fishing on Loch Pityoulish and we even checked out the traditional nest site on Loch an Eilean.

The road from Coylumbridge to Loch Morlich was little more than a dry stream, so it came as no great surprise when the front wheel of TC's cycle disintegrated, fortunately slowly. The hirer replaced the machine without question.

Crossbills proved difficult, particularly as we were not familiar with the call, but we eventually tracked down a family party near Coylumbridge. Such was the camaraderie amongst birdwatchers in those days that we had no qualms about striding up to the front door of the legendary Desmond Nethersole-Thompson to ask for information.

Over Creag nan Gall we spotted our first Peregrine and later the same morning found a Ring Ouzel's nest containing 4 young, which were just at the right stage for us to ring. The day's *piece de resistance* was to look over a cliff face to see a Golden Eagle below. *(Today we would be fined for such irresponsibility!)*

Loch Ruthven, we were told, was the place for Slavonian Grebes. This involved taking the train from Aviemore to Daviot with the cycles in the guard's van, and then 10 miles by road to Loch Ruthven. The Slavonian Grebes were very confiding, but a real bonus was a pair of Black-throated Divers with 2 young. We spent so long taking turns to use the telescope (4 foot of brass and leather) that we almost missed our return train.

Social event

In Aviemore, the big social event each week was the Friday dance in the village hall. However, it came as a surprise when the breakfast waitress, who had treated us with a mixture of curiosity and amusement, asked if would be going. The thought horrified us. With only 20 hours of daylight for birdwatching per day, dancing was a low priority. We declined!

One day, we cycled into the hills above Duthill. At a cliff face, a passing Raven was seen off by a pair of Peregrines. On the moors were nesting Golden Plover, Dunlin and Short-eared Owl, but the day's star bird was a male Hen Harrier, another new species. They were then just starting to expand their range as persecution was reduced.

Panic

At the start of the second week, there was panic in the air. We hadn't seen a Dotterel yet, and every morning the tops of the Cairngorms had been shrouded in mist. In desperation, we walked up to the Wells of Dee via Glen Einich in low cloud and drizzle. This produced nothing except wet clothes for Mrs Stephen's airing cupboard. We cycled to Achlean with the idea of going up Carn Ban Mor, but, after walking for about 30 minutes, the rain drove us back, and we took shelter in a boat house by Loch Insh. Was it any wonder that JW went down with pneumonia on returning home? Two more attempts were made walking along the Lairig Ghru and up over Sron na Lairige, but, although we had great views of our first Ptarmigan, there were no Dotterel. All too soon, we were on the train heading for Nuneaton with great satisfaction. We felt we had pushed back the barriers of science and had only missed out on one species.

According to my notebook, it was 5 years later that TC and myself returned to Aviemore. JW, having been caught by National Service, was busy adding new species to the Cyprus list, in between keeping an eye on Archbishop Makarios.

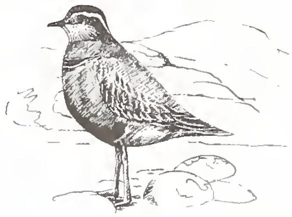
This time, we arrived in the luxury of a Ford Popular, and our first expedition was to Carn ban Mor.

John Burton

This article first appeared in the Ayrshire Branch newsletter The Stonechat. *We are always interested to see branch newsletters with a view to sharing features of general interest with the wider SOC membership.*

Special Protection Areas

Two more Special Protection Areas under the EU Wild Birds Directive have been declared. One is the Kintyre Goose roosts on the Kintyre peninsula, which is a wintering area for internationally important numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese. The site has also been classified as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The other is Ben Wyvis, a mountain area north of Inverness, which supports important numbers of breeding Dotterel.



Dotterel *Mike Ashley*

Hen Harrier proposals

The Game Conservancy Trust's proposals for Hen Harrier conservation in the United Kingdom were launched last autumn prior to the Moorland Summit in Scotland.
They propose 3 initiatives:
Translocation – Starting new breeding groups of harriers by releasing young birds into suitable habitats where harriers have lived previously
Quota System – Grouse moor owners would be required to support a set number of breeding harriers each year. Numbers above this quota could be limited by egg removal. This could enable many more harriers to live on grouse moors safely
Diversionary Feeding – Hen harriers are fed by humans to limit the amount of grouse they eat.

The issues have already been discussed in *SBN 49*. The Trust accepts that translocation would not work on its own in reducing predation on grouse and the consequent illegal killing of Hen Harriers.

Simon Thirgood, the Trust's head of raptor research, thinks that integrating all 3 methods offers the best hope to increase Hen Harrier populations and stop illegal killing. The trust estimates that the quota system could more than double Hen Harrier numbers within a decade, because moor owners and gamekeepers would accept the obligation to protect breeding Hen Harriers at numbers compatible with a reasonable amount of grouse for shooting. Despite protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, no successful prosecution for killing Hen Harriers has ever been brought in Scotland. Hen Harriers are frequently shot and their nests destroyed and eggs crushed. Between 1988 and 1995, RSPB research indicated that up to 15% of females were killed each year.

The full report ***Hen Harrier Translocation as a Conservation Tool in the United Kingdom – a Feasibility Study*** *by Mark Watson The Game Conservancy Trust is in the Waterston Library.*

Protective behaviour of Mallard drakes

Some croft land near me is usually flooded in the spring and used for breeding by Mallards. Normally they spent some time in my garden but ignore my small (2.0 x 2.5m) pond. They usually disappear to the river 400m away before the young fledge. This year a drake and 2 ducks appeared together in April, shortly followed separately by a further 2 drakes and another duck. The first duck to hatch its eggs had 9 ducklings, while a week later another had 8. The duck brood of 9 ducklings was gradually reduced to 5. At this point 2 drakes and a duck which seemed to have no young of its own began to accompany the brood. Extensive use was made of my pond, which was encircled by the 2 ducks and 2 drakes whenever the 5 young were in the pond. The drakes were observed attacking Herring Gulls that approached within 3-5m of the young. As soon as the young were old enough ie about 4 weeks and before fledging, the entire group disappeared, presumably to the River Brora, 400m away.

Throughout this time the duck with 8 young continued to rear them on her own, also making extensive use of my pond. Although she received no assistance from the other ducks and drakes she succeeded in rearing all 8 ducklings. They were observed to be well guarded by the mother which attacked Herring Gulls and a cat. On one occasion the mother was observed to drag an adult Herring Gull about 20m, holding it by the neck. Also she attacked drakes if they approached. This group continued to use my pond until after the young had fledged. The young then gradually disappeared. The mother and 2 of the young left at the beginning of August. The third drake ignored all the others apart from mating attempts with all 3 ducks whenever it saw a chance.

A J Davenport

Red-necked Phalarope in Central Perthshire in 1944 &1945

During the summer term of 1944 Loch Moraig (NN 907666) was visited by myself and some of my contemporaries on several occasions. On at least 2 such visits a single Red-necked Phalarope was observed near the northern end of the loch. Each time the bird was seen feeding on the water near the shore and on short flights. It was clearly disturbed by human presence and became quite agitated. We strongly suspected breeding. However, definitive proof was not obtained. During the 1945 summer term a further sighting of a single individual was obtained, but again without proof of breeding. On no occasion was a pair seen together. Each time our impression was that we were observing a female, though we were never really sure about this. Our inference was that a male might be incubating a clutch or perhaps have very small young concealed in the vegetation. At that time the vegetation was predominantly Heather except on the very wet areas of marsh/bog. Only 3 of my contemporaries were party to the information and considerable care was taken to maintain secrecy, since there were a couple of our fellow pupils known to be interested in egg collecting.

I was occasionally able to revisit Loch Moraig in summer in later years. On each occasion in 1950, 1951 & 1958 no further phalarope sightings were obtained. For instance, on 10 July 1950 numerous Curlew and Oystercatchers were recorded and several pairs of both Common Sandpipers and Redshank. Little Grebe, Gadwall and Tufted Duck were present.

On 2 occasions I was able to take my father, the late H G Hurrell, to the area when he visited from Devon and on 3 July 1944 we enjoyed a good view of a single phalarope. A visit in 1945 was probably too late in the year and no phalaropes were seen.

Leonard Hurrell

Baxter and Rintoul record breeding by this species on Rannoch moor around 1830.

Although breeding was not proved in this case such records can be useful and should be passed to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (as this has been) normally via the local recorder. Members are reminded of the law relating to Schedule 1 species.

A Twite by any other name

Over the past 7 or so years we have carried out a number of studies into the biology of the Twite, concentrating particularly on their behaviour, habitats and status in the winter months. One of the things that became clear during the course of this work was that a lot of people who are not birdwatchers think that the Twites' name is .. well... rather ridiculous. By implication anyone interested in Twites or their conservation is.... er.... A bit of a twit, or a twitcher, or both.

There is, of course, a serious point to all this. The names of a species can have an effect on how it is viewed by the public, and this in turn can affect how that species is conserved. An obvious example is the Monkey-eating Eagle, a species blessed with a highly descriptive but very ugly name. It lives in the Philippines and to help its conservation, as it is endangered, and to make people in its native range have more pride in it, it has been renamed the Philippine Eagle or even the Great Philippine Eagle.

Back to the Twite. We know that in Scotland in the non breeding season Twites are particularly dependent on agricultural habitats, especially weedy turnip fields, and that persuading farmers and crofters not to be too enthusiastic at clearing the weeds from their crops is likely to be important to the species' future fortunes. As with the Monkey-eating Eagle it is important that such people have a sense of involvement with, and thus a sense of ownership of, the Twite, and its name seems to be an impediment to this. Imagine trying to get a crofter or farmer to put up a notice saying that his fields are "Twite friendly". He is in danger of becoming a laughing stock.

So what alternative name might we choose for the Twite? There are several traditional local names in Scotland, most being variations on Lintie: Lintie itself, Heather Lintie, Hill Lintie, Yellow-neb Lintie as well as Mountain Linnet and Lintwhite, the latter being the names used by Burns. Lintie is simple and has a good ring to it, but has the drawback of being a synonym for the Linnet. Our preference is for Heather Lintie, which also trips easily off the tongue and should be seen by non birdwatchers as 'friendly', poetic even.

We are keen that everything possible is done to ensure that the Twite is conserved in Britain, and believe strongly that there is a case for changing its name to help this. In many respects it is rather an anonymous little brown bird; it urgently needs something to make it more familiar and friendly, and we believe that a change of name might be one way of achieving this. We welcome view from other birdwatchers and conservationists.

Hugh Clark & Robin Sellers

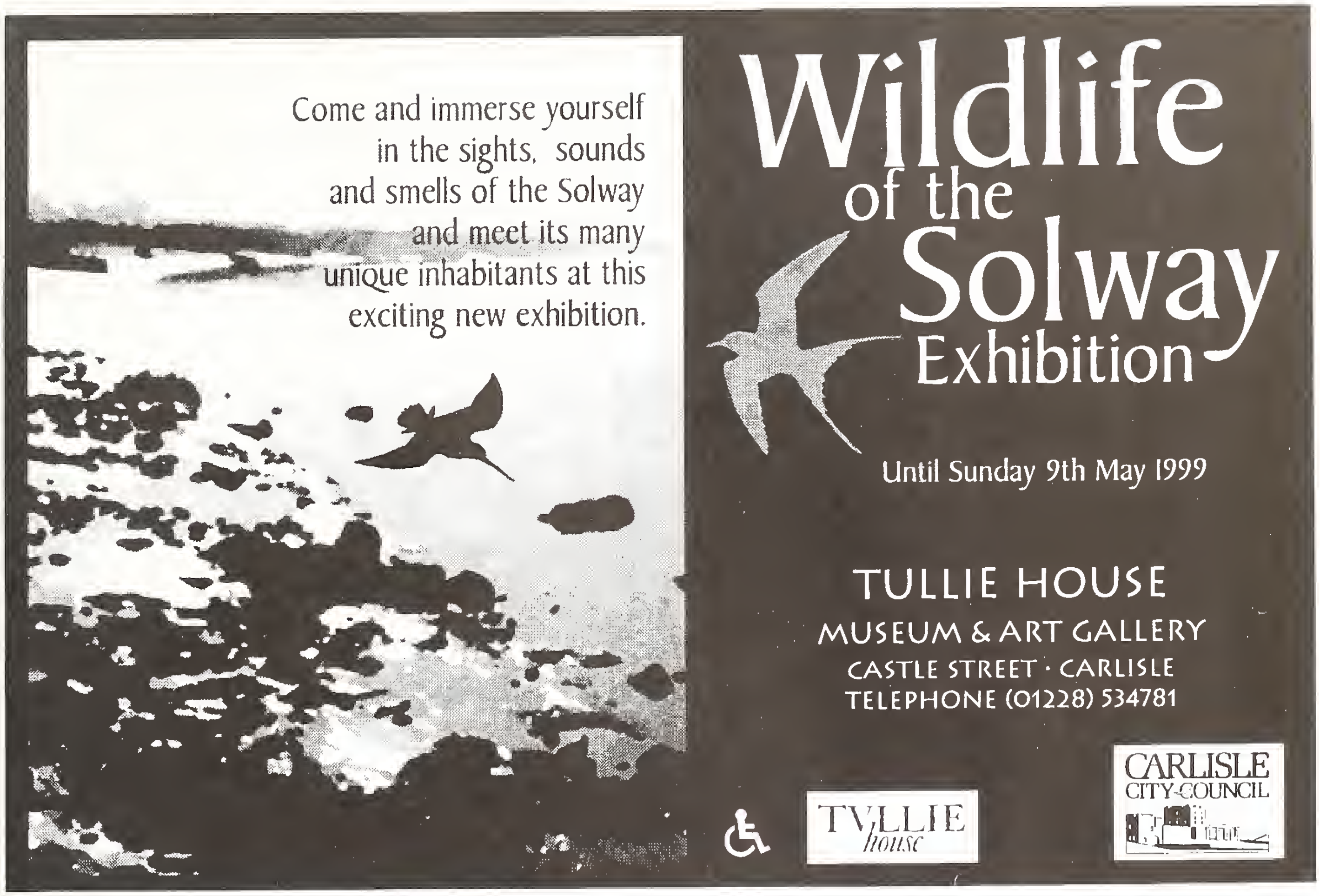
Perhaps it would have to be Heather Linnet in English? This idea is an interesting one and could be extended. For example, the Knot is possibly even more in need of a name change. Other names that might be thought in need of revision though for widely different reasons, include Shag and anything that is called common since it is bound to be uncommon somewhere. However changing birds' names is a controversial process as became very evident when British Birds published its revised list with names such as Northern Wheatear which many people still refuse to use.

Tawny Owl *David Mitchell*

Unusual choice of nest site by a Tawny Owl

On 8 May 1998 I made my first visit of the year to the Altnaharra area as part of a fieldwork contract with RSPB. On calling in at the caravan site at Grumore, Loch Naver to see John and Brenda Lunn, they informed me of an unusual choice of nest site by a Tawny Owl. According to the river manager in Strathnaver, Bill Drury, the bird had chosen to nest on the corrugated iron sheeting roof of a shed, hard up against the wall of his house at Ceann-na-Coille, near Syre. The roof sloped at an angle of approximately 25 degrees and had an open aspect facing a small Lodgepole Pine plantation approximately 80m away. When disturbed the owl would fly to this plantation and return to the 'nest' after around 10 minutes. They had first visited the site on 26 April, when the bird was seen sitting alongside a single egg, a second egg having previously rolled off the roof. The remaining egg apparently rolled off the roof a few days later, but the owl continued to sit in the same place daily until at least 10 June.

David Butterfield



Wildlife of the Solway

A new exhibition at Tullie House Museum in Carlisle was officially opened by David Bellamy in November. Entitled the Wildlife of the Solway, this temporary exhibition runs until 9 May 1999.

The Solway Firth is the third largest estuary in Britain and is a very important wildlife site, not just for its hundreds of thousands of visiting birds but also for many other creatures and habitats. The Solway mosses comprise some 60% of the remaining intact raised bogs in England. They are of great importance for their specialised wildlife such as the Large Heath Butterfly, Bog Rosemary and White-faced Dragonfly; 10% of the British population of Natterjack Toads occur on the Solway and 21 species of bird are present in nationally or internationally important numbers.

But how many people really appreciate the splendour and importance of this natural resource? Recently many interested individuals and organisations around the estuary combined to form the Solway Firth Partnership and a review and strategy for the Firth have been produced. One of the issues raised is the lack of public knowledge regarding the importance of the wildlife and the countryside of the Solway.

With this exhibition Tullie House Museum hopes to help raise peoples' awareness and appreciation of the Solway, its wildlife and some of the concerns for its future well being. The displays explore the geological foundations of the Solway, the glacial topography leading to the formation of the peat mosses and the wildlife habitats of peat bogs, saltmarsh, mudflats, sand dunes and sea cliffs that surround the Firth.

Designed to interest children and family groups, as well as birdwatchers and naturalists, the exhibition includes a giant turtle, a sea cliff complete with nesting sea birds, a seal cave and a 2.5 metre long tuna fish stranded at Silloth in 1891.

Tullie House is open Mon-Sat 10am-5pm and Sunday 12 noon-5pm. Adults £3.75 Concessions £2.75/£2.25. Family Ticket £12.00 **Telephone 01228 534781**

Kestrel survey

There are an estimated 52,000 pairs of Kestrels in the UK, although numbers may have declined by as much as 35% over the last 25 years. Kestrels are familiar largely as they are so often seen hunting beside roads, but their numbers are falling because of a range of factors, including lack of voles, the Kestrel's main prey. The YOC are now launching a survey – details and forms from YOC at **The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL.**

Planning Guideline

New National Planning Policy Guidelines on Natural Heritage (NPPG) were launched in January. The NPPG highlights not only the importance of protecting wildlife sites but emphasises that the protection of wildlife and habitats must extend beyond the confines of specific designated sites. This guidance is of particular importance for species such as the Golden Eagle which requires large territories which are difficult to protect with designations.

Concern for Pink-footed Geese

It is likely that many people look forward to the sound of Pinkfeet arriving in autumn and they enliven our birdwatching during the dark winter days. However as spring approaches they head off back to Iceland and their vast breeding grounds. The key site is Thjorsarver, whose importance was discovered by James Fisher, Finnur Gudmundsson and Peter Scott back in the 1950s. During the early 1960s and 70s plans to turn the area into a vast hydroelectric reservoir were defeated by international condemnation. Needless to say the Icelandic electricity company *Landsvirkjun* are again arguing that a big hydro electric scheme with a aluminium smelting works is just what is needed to save the rural communities.

At the moment the Icelandic government is considering whether flooding the main breeding site of the bulk of the worlds population of Pinkfeet requires an environmental impact assessment. If you think it does, and you would like to see our geese back in future years they you may wish to let your feeling by known to the **Icelandic Ambassador, Icelandic Embassy, No 1 Eton Terrace, London SW1.**

REVIEWS

The Breeding Birds of South East Scotland*. R Murray, M Holling, H Dott & P Vandome. 1998. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Edinburgh ISBN 0 9512139 11. £31.95.*

This publication has rightly received the plaudits of the ornithological press and a summary by one of the authors featured in SBN in June 1998. First impressions of this book give a feeling of quality, from the solid covers to the smartly packaged text. Indeed, the whole product is finished to an exceptionally high standard, and more than stands comparison with some of the English regional atlases as well as the 2 major national breeding birds atlases. The information obtained by SOC members during the 2 previous national projects of 1968-72 and 1998-94 is put to good use in this book since comparative distribution maps for those periods are conveniently placed below the current regional map, allowing the reader immediate comparison.

Hen Goshawk *Arthur Gilpin*

The first part of the atlas deals with the more straightforward factors affecting bird distribution in the area, such as habitat types, this section reinforced by a splendid series of colour aerial photograph highlighting the diversity encountered by the 250 fieldworkers. Further backed by detailed maps, the different habitats are summarised, offering a broad outline of the main species likely to be encountered within each. One minor quibble with this part is the location of the section on Climate. Sandwiched between habitat descriptions of Wetlands and Agriculture, the importance of such a dynamic factor appears a bit lost and might have been better dealt with separately. One section I enjoyed greatly was the Discussion, Methodology and Fieldwork section which suggested reasons for major changes in distribution of the birds of South East Scotland. Combined with a realistic appraisal of any inaccuracies likely to have occurred in the compilation of such a mass of records, this part did nevertheless highlight some of the doubts expressed over recent atlas methodology. Many would be authors of atlases must envy the formidable IT expertise of Peter Vandome.

As for the species accounts, which I suspect will be the main reason for most people buying this book, these are quite excellent. Each account draws on the vast wealth of experience accumulated over the years by fieldworkers both specialised and general, and additions to the distribution maps such as population counts, comparison with national figures, altitudinal distribution and habitat preference are often presented in clear, graphic form. Perhaps one major advantage which this type of atlas has over a national one lies in the detail affordable to the map maker. Each map shows shaded land above 200 metres and includes all the main watercourses, allowing easy location of areas within the region. Here one is immediately able to relate both comments in the text and impressions from graphs to the patterns displayed on the species maps.

The careful and methodical layout of each species description takes account of the varying interpretations likely to be directed towards them, with rare breeders such as Goshawk, problem species like Yellow Wagtail and tricky species like Willow Tit being sensitively handled. Even non breeding species such as Goldeneye are well documented – it wouldn't dare nest on the English side! Increasing species like Buzzard and Lesser Black-backed Gull pinpoint some interesting trends in both avian and human behaviour, whilst the fate of birds like the Corn Bunting will be all too familiar to many. The real value of the Borders hills can scarcely by guessed at via the national atlases, when it comes to breeding species such as Lapwing, Golden Plover and Curlew, whilst questions about the methodology employed by the *New Atlas* are raised by species such as Chiffchaff. Throughout the species accounts, the appearance of the text is beautifully enlivened by the artwork, particularly that of Steven Brown.

Appendices, dealing with individual species work, complement the main text in a book which is bursting with information. Personally, and perhaps a bit unfairly, I thought it rendered the *New Atlas* almost completely obsolete as a source of local information. As a conservation tool, it will serve the needs of South east Scotland extremely well. For most of us though, it's simply a wonderful example of a well written mine of information which is hard to lay down. If you've not already got a copy, you've really got to ask yourself why not!

Angus Hogg

Our policy on book reviews is to keep them relatively short to fit within an average of one page per issue of SBN. However, where the book is of particular importance to Scottish ornithology longer reviews are appropriate as in this case.

Belize and Northern Guatemala – The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide *by Les Beletsky. Paperback published by Academic Press 1999. 487pp. ISBN 0-12-084811-2. £19.95*

This book is aimed at environmentally conscious travellers. It includes chapters on the habitats, parks and reserves of Belize and Northern Guatemala ie the area between Belize and Mexico known as The Peten and on environmental threats and conservation issues. These are followed by chapters on the Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds, Mammals and Marine Life which a visitor may encounter, together with good identification plates in colour, with narrative alongside giving brief identification details, the habitat and likely districts in which the species might be found. The section on Habitats includes drawings of the leaves and fruits of some common trees and plants. There are some habitat photographs at the end. The author did not attempt to cover every species and visitors interested in plants, butterflies and moths or insects would need other literature. A very useful general guide nevertheless.

Joan Wilcox

Costa Rica – The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide *by Les Beletsky. Paperback published by Academic Press 1998 426 pp. ISBN 0-12-084810-4. £19.95*

This Wildlife Guide follows a similar format to the Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide on Belize & Northern Guatemala, see separate review. A good all-round guide but not all the birds which would be found on a specialised bird tour are included.

Joan Wilcox

A Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka *by G M Henry. Third Edition 1998: revised and enlarged by T W Hoffmann, D Warakogoda & U Ekanayake. Oxford University Press: Delhi, 489 pp. ISBN 0 19 563813 1 £25*

Henry's *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon*, was first published in Oxford in 1955. A second edition, which was essentially a reprint of the first edition with an updating appendix, was produced locally in Kandy in 1971. It has remained the only volume to cover in any detail all the birds of Sri Lanka. This 1998 third edition, published by OUP (Delhi) has been extensively revised by 3 of the most experienced ornithologists active in Sri Lanka today. The classic illustrations of GM Henry are retained in their original form, and 2 additional colour plates and 6 line drawings by Bruce Henry, the son of the author, have been added. The list of species included has been extended and the text has been brought up to date, especially in describing the distribution of species. This is not a typical modern field guide to be used simply for identification purposes; it is much more. Numerous field guides to birds of the Indian sub continent exist, and these can be used for Sri Lanka. However, a copy of Henry is an essential travelling companion for birders visiting Sri Lanka who want to achieve more than a tick list. Despite the troubles that have existed in the north of the island for several years, Sri Lanka must be placed highly on anyone's list of places to visit. It is certainly the jewel off the tip of India with its rich birdlife, diverse habitats, beautiful scenery and most friendly people.

Ian R Poxton

Tundra Plovers: The Eurasian, Pacific and American Golden Plovers and Grey Plover by Ingvar Byrkjedal and Des Thompson. *Published by T and AD Poyser Ltd. 1998. 422pp. ISBN 0-85661-109-3. £28*

The latest addition to the Poyser series is on the 4 species of 'tundra plover' in the genus *Pluvialis* The enthusiasm of the authors for their subject is translated into a fast-moving, well illustrated, delightfully descriptive and lively text which drags the reader out into the field to witness, as at first hand, the behaviour of these wonderful birds. As would be expected, the breeding biology of the birds is covered in some depth, with much information which has never been published or easily accessible before. In contrast, coverage outside the breeding season, which may only last 2 months for northern birds, receives less substantial treatment. Behaviour and ecology of the Eurasian Golden Plover in the non breeding season gets less than 4 sides of text! This is clearly inadequate, and reflects not only the interests and field studies of the authors, but also the fact that much of the relevant information about these species is still not known.

The book is packed with information, and a full picture of 4 species of plover, their historical and ecological relationships, their similarities to each other and their idiosyncrasies. The idiosyncrasies of the authors come through – for their studies of migration strategies they persuaded the world's museums to photograph over 3000 dead plovers! A 3 degree global temperature rise could wipe out the lichen/moss tundra on which the Grey Plover breeds – clearly those people who deny that global warming is happening, or think there is nothing we can do about it, are taking a very risky line A hugely interesting book, with particular relevance for Scottish ornithologists.

Martin Collinson

Fish eating Birds and Salmonids in Scotland an important report has just been published by the Scottish Office - a full summary will be published in the June issue of SBN.

REQUESTS

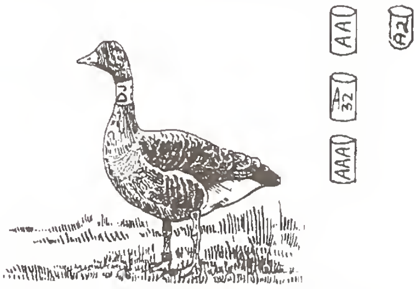
Darvic ringed Oystercatchers
See *SBN* 50

Colour ringed Shags
See *SBN* 50

Breeding origins of Scottish Barnacle Geese - DNA samples required
See *SBN* 51

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329).**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Reed Warblers in Scotland

I am carrying out a review of possible breeding records for Reed Warblers in Scotland. If anyone has any records of a bird/birds in suitable habitat then please get in touch with me. I am particularly interested in hearing of any records in July or August. All contributions will be acknowledged in publication. **Derek Robertson, Woodlands, Bandrum, nr Carnock, Fife KY12 9HR. (01383 852997)**

SOC NOTICES

Sylvia Laing

Our hard working Secretary has to go into hospital from late February for what we expect to be a routine operation and is unlikely to be back in Regent Terrace until late April.

A number of volunteers (see below) have kindly offered to assist the club during Sylvia's absence but there may be some delay in responding to enquiries: Membership: Sue Goode and Joan Wilcox; Winter programme: Frank Hamilton; Annual Conference programme: Ian Darling; Publications: Joan Wilcox; Accounts: Peter Vandome; General enquiries: Ian Darling and others. The Library will continue as normal with the help of John Law, Keith Macgregor, John Davies, Roger Brewer, John Ballantyne, Sue Goode and Hetty Harper.

We all send Sylvia our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Stewartry Branch

Would members please note that the AGM & Member's night has been brought forward to 1 April 1999.

Perth and Kinross Recorder

Please note the new address for Ron Youngman the recorder for Perth and Kinross. His address is **Blairchroisk Cottage, Ballinluig, Pitlochry, Perthshire PH9 0NE**

Seabird 2000

Seabird 2000 is a major new initiative to census all breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland. The aim is to census all 24 species of seabird regularly breeding in Britain and Ireland.

Both countries hold internationally important populations of seabirds, and it therefore important that we know the distribution and numbers involved in order that temporal changes and causes may be identified. If you are interested in taking part please contact **Dr Ian Mitchell, JNCC, Seabirds & Cetaceans Team, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UZ. Fax 01224 621488; Email: mitche_i@jncc.gov.uk**

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:- **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 266362**

200 Club reaches 200!

Well done – we made it! At the Conference 8 members joined and we now (December 1998) have 202 members, so not only has the SOC benefited but the number and size of prizes will be greater this year. Already there was an extra £50 in August and the top prize in November was increased from £100 to £150. For our 10th year, ending in May, we will have been able to give the SOC £1200, with a similar sum being returned in prizes. This means that in the 10 years since the 200 Club started its members' support will have helped the SOC by £9500 – a remarkable sum which Council readily acknowledges in its Annual Reports. Thank you all. Details of how money was donated to the SOC this year will be published later.

Reminder notices for renewal of membership of our 11th year, starting on 1 June, will be sent in April to existing members who do not pay a standing order.

New members are always welcome, and we must recruit some to replace the few who do not continue their membership. Having reached 200 we want to keep it there! If you would like to join, or take out another membership, please write to me enclosing a cheque for £12, payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. The annual subscription never increases! This will cover the 12 months from June 1 and will be acknowledged.

If you have not yet won a prize, don't despair! In 10 years 393 prizes will have been given out to members, totalling £9500 – you have roughly a 1 in 4 chance of winning which is far better than the lottery!! Please continue to support the SOC and you may yet be a lucky winner.

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1998 were:-

October – 1st £30 J B Lambie, Drummore; 2nd £20 T D Dobson, Galashiels; 3rd £10 LD Maciver, Stornoway

November – 1st £150 P W Sandeman, Killin; 2nd £75 Dr E Tennant, Glasgow; 3rd £50 S Laing, Perth; 4th £30 N Stabler, Inveresk; 5th £20 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 6th £10 P Collett, Thurso

December – 1st £30 B Etheridge, Avoch; 2nd £20 R Smith, Lockerbie; 3rd £10 E MacGregor, East Linton

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176)

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Dates for first of the 1999/2000 winter meetings

Ayrshire 15 Sept; Borders, 6 Sept; Caithness 8 Sept; Dumfries 15 Sept; Fife 15 Sept; Grampian 6 Sept; Highland 7 Sept; Lothian 14 Sept; Orkney 9 Sept; Stewartry 16 Sept; Stirling 16 Sept; Tayside 16 Sept; West Galloway 14 Sept.

Dr Algirdas Knystautas is doing a short tour in Scotland in November and will give a lecture in Ayr on 1 November; Dumfries 2 November; Fife 3 November and Lothian 4 November. Further details will be available in due course.

1999 Annual Conference

The 1999 Annual Conference will be held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore over the weekend 29/31 October 1999. Further details will be sent with the September mailing.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks to the volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace to assist in sending out the December mailing. They were: Cath Craig, Joan Wilcox, Keith Macgregor, Elisabeth Law, Bob & Betty Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Noreen Stabler, Angus and Chris Smith, John Davies. Fleur Mattocks.

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THE SCOTTISH
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Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Joan Wilcox

SMITHSONIAN
AUG 09 1999
LIBRARIES

Scotland's Parliament and Scotland's birds

As this issue of SBN goes to the printer the elections for Scotland's first parliament for 300 years have just been held. By the time you read this the MSPs will be in place even though not in their new building which is still under construction a few minutes as the town pigeon flies from 21 Regent Terrace.

Does it matter?

The question here refers to birds and the SOC not other aspects of Scottish life.

After much media attention the voting figures were significantly below those reached in General Elections though better than those normally recorded when local councils are involved. Despite speculation that the wet weather on polling day depressed the turnout, it is more realistic to accept that many Scots are unsure of the new system and not entirely convinced of its value.

The fact that for the first time ever a Green MP was successful in a Parliamentary election in Britain shows what can happen with a different voting system. However, not all ornithologists will feel that voting Green is automatically the best way to advance conservation.

Even those political parties who opposed devolution took the view that they had to become involved in the Parliament and campaigned accordingly. It is important that ornithologists, whatever their political interests, take an interest in the new body because other players in the field of environmental policy most certainly are. Also, given that devolution is meant to be about moving decision making from London to Edinburgh and, by implication, towards more local levels, there are already increasing demands for local communities to have more say over conservation issues. This is a reasonable principle but in practice it can mean certain short term interests getting their way at the expense of the longer term and national or even international priorities.

Tree Sparrow feeding young *Jim Young*

Pressure and influence

A disturbing feature of recent years has been the increasingly aggressive and intolerant attitude of a number of parties with outdoor interests in conservation. Some shooters, anglers, pigeon fanciers as well as some farmers and landowners have expressed views on such matters as the protection of birds of prey and access to land, which, if accepted by legislators and government, will set conservation back in the country. Often the views are based on 'practical experience' which is contrasted with 'conservation' and even 'science' as though these had become rather dirty words. The vein of intolerance which lies behind all this reflects some genuine problems and fears such as the decline in farm incomes but also a degree of bluster by people who do not want to face facts. Faced with this, it is essential that conservationists are prepared and able to put their views across to the media and decision makers. This may seem obvious but it is worrying that even professional conservationists too often seem to be outflanked by more streetwise lobbyists. There are many positive things to report such as the beneficial effect conservation can have on jobs (see page 3) but such messages do not always make the headlines they should. Not that headlines are necessarily a measure of influence – behind the scenes lobbying of various forms can often be the most effective method of reaching the people who take important decisions. However, to do this requires skill, resources and a good grasp of essential facts.

Facts and figures

These must be the basis of the SOC's contribution to conservation. SOC does not have the resources to employ professional lobbyists and public relations people or to buy large nature reserves nor do we need to, given the existence of RSPB and SWT. However, we do have a role as coordinator and publisher of information on what is actually happening to Scotland's wild birds. It is vital that we build on this and bring it to the attention of those who make decisions and their advisers. In so doing we can also address some of the concerns about the future of the Club expressed elsewhere in this issue

Stan da Prato

Harriers again

SNH has published a booklet on behalf of the Moorland Working Group based on trails of supplementary feeding at Hen Harrier nests at Langholm which has been sent to over 200 estates. The convenor of the Scottish Landowners Federation has welcomed the booklet but the chairman of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association is quoted in the media as being 'very sceptical'.

Summer sandeel consumption by seabirds breeding in the Firth of Forth

The industrial fishery for sandeels is currently the largest single species fishery in the North Sea and this species is also the main food of many seabirds breeding in colonies in this area. It has been suggested that inshore sandeel fisheries could have adverse consequences for local seabird populations. One potential area of concern is the fishing grounds on the banks (Wee Bankie and Marr Bank) which lie approximately 40 km off the entrance to the Firth of Forth, well within the feeding range of many seabirds breeding at colonies in and around the Firth of Forth. For the last 2 summers an EU funded project – Effects of Large scale Industrial Fisheries on Non Target Species (ELIFONTS) – has been looking in detail at, amongst other things, the food needs of the birds, seals and larger fish living in the area. Sarah Wanless and Mike Harris (ITE, Banchory) and Simon Greenstreet (FRS Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen) have, in a paper published in ICES *Journal of Marine Science* (1998, 55:1141-1151), come up with the first assessments of how many sandeels the seabirds eat during the summer.

Using counts of birds at colonies, local dietary information and breeding success, they constructed a bioenergetics model which estimated that the total of 154,000 pairs of the 8 species of seabird which fed on sandeels consumed 6,000-17,000 tonnes of sandeels during each of the summers of 1996 and 1997. The majority of the fish were at least one year old. Distributions of birds at sea recorded during a systematic survey during the breeding season demonstrated that the Wee Bankie was an important feeding area for Guillemot, Razorbill and Kittiwake and to a lesser extent Puffin, indicating that the exploitation of sandeels by these species shows strong spatial overlap with the industrial fishery. In contrast, Shags and Common/Arctic Terns showed predominantly inshore distributions while the Gannet probably fed mainly outside the area surveyed. Species specific comparisons of the estimated size of the observed at sea populations with those predicted from the number of individuals associated with colonies in the area suggests that during the chick rearing period a high proportion of the Firth of Forth Guillemot population was feeding in the surveyed area. However, for the other species the number observed at sea was consistently lower than predicted.

The size of the sandeel stock associated with the Wee Bankie is currently unknown. Comparison of the size of the annual catch of the fishery and the amount taken by seabirds indicates that in most years the former has been consistently higher than the latter. Thus the potential for the fishery to affect seabirds is likely to be greater than the converse.

Mike Harris

Puffin and Guillemot *M Hayes*

Conservation helps to underpin jobs

Conservation of Scotland's natural environment plays a significant role in supporting rural development. Scottish Natural Heritage has estimated that about £135 million of public money is spent annually on conservation management of land or on helping people to understand and enjoy wildlife and the countryside. This helps to support over 8,000 jobs, some 40% of which are in rural areas.

According to George Campbell, North Scotland Manager for RSPB, if Scotland is to maintain and enhance its rich habitats and wildlife, this will require more involvement from local people, more positive management and more money. The notion that conservation does not support jobs is a nonsense. In the Highlands and Islands alone the number of jobs sustained by the natural environment has doubled in the last 10 years and is still increasing. People living and working in rural Scotland should not fear conservation but welcome it. RSPB Scotland spends over £2.5 million a year on nature reserves in Scotland, creating employment both directly through staff and indirectly through the use of local contractors and services. Many reserves also provide grazing for local landowners, crofters and farmers. Almost half a million people visit RSPB reserves annually, supporting many more local jobs.

The various ways in which the natural heritage helps generate employment in Scotland, particularly in rural areas, are summarised in a booklet *Jobs and the Natural Heritage* produced by Scottish Natural Heritage. The booklet shows that tourists participating in hill walking generate £257 million (15% of total tourist expenditure in Scotland), supporting about 9,400 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs across Scotland, those participating in field/nature studies contribute a further £70 million, supporting a further 2,600 FTE jobs, while wildlife related tourism supports a further 6,000 FTE jobs, of which two thirds are in the Highlands and Islands. Free copies can be obtained from local SNH offices.

Examples include RSPB's Forsinard Nature Reserve in Sutherland. This reserve supports 2 full time staff and several seasonal staff. A recent survey by an independent consultant estimated that visitors to the reserve contributed £630,000 to the Caithness and Sutherland economy in 1997. Deer management and trout fishing on the reserve are leased locally, providing further jobs and income. Around 1,600 ha of the reserve are also managed by a local farmer.

At Abernethy Nature Reserve, Speyside, RSPB has 6 full time staff, with up to 16 seasonal staff. The reserve, and particularly the Osprey Centre, attracts 50,000 visitors who contribute to the local economy. A report in 1997 estimated that in total over 87 FTE jobs in Badenoch & Strathspey were supported by the reserve.

At the RSPB Loch Gruinart Reserve on Islay, a survey carried out in 1998 estimated that visitors spend almost £1 million per annum on Islay, of which £311,000 is spent during the winter months when geese are present.

Recent estimates by RSPB Scotland and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation show that between them birdwatchers and goose shooters spend a total of £5.4 million in local economies around Scottish goose sites, much of it in the autumn and winter ' off seasons'. This expenditure supports over 100 FTE jobs.

A visitor survey in 1995 estimated that holiday makers visiting Shetland that year spent a total of £4.1 million, of which just over £1 million was by those giving birdlife as their main reason for visiting. This supported an estimated 43 full time equivalent jobs.

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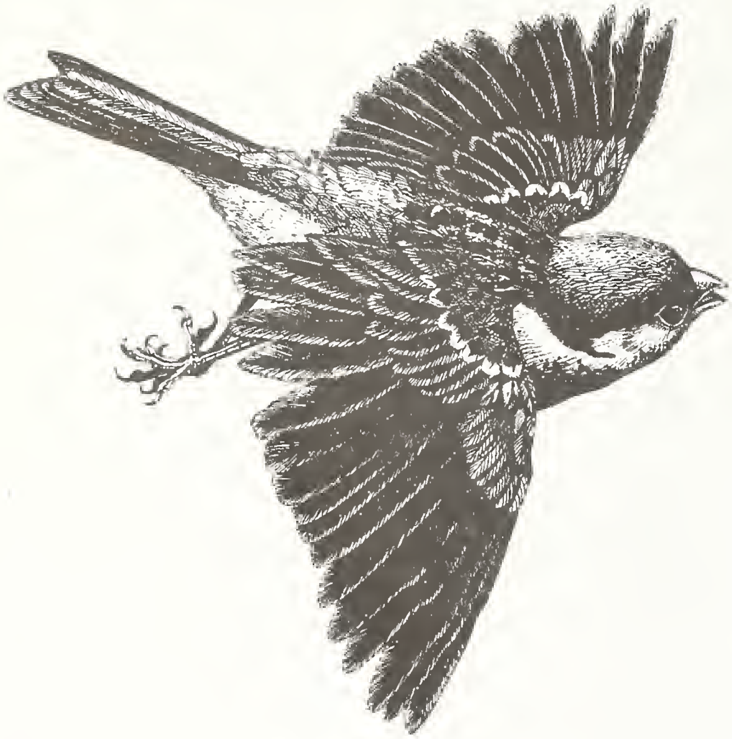
Birds in a Cupar Garden



House Sparrow *David Mitchell*

It was actually the uplifting nature of the March Newsletter which reminded me that I had sort of promised this article to our Editor, if only to give him (the readers, actually) a break from his own 'filler'. I use the word 'uplifting' in its truly physical sense. When Fiona and/or Mike delivered my newsletter, the address label was firmly attached to the top right corner, thereby obscuring the last 3 letters of 'Branch'. My Fife Bra Newsletter was therefore eagerly scrutinised. I was disappointed; where were the glossy piccies, Martin? Dare I also point out that whoever printed the address label has 'boobed'; the postcode is wrong.

My garden in Cupar is secluded and mature, covering some 500 square metres. Some would say a better description would be overgrown! In fact we practise a rigorous regime of passive husbandry. However, the birds like it and it sports several feeders and a nice stone bird bath. Its natural food consists of Cotoneaster berries galore, rose hips in season, as well as all the weed seeds which I'm supposed to get rid of. Now and again my plum and apple trees produce fruit which is extremely popular and mostly left for the birds. Other bushes produce seeds enjoyed by finches. Slugs abound, while rockeries and thick hedge bottoms provide plenty of insect larvae and spiders. It is also free from all chemicals. The bushes and trees also provide cover when the cat is around, although he is too lazy even to bother the Blackbird when it comes into the kitchen in summer to eat his food. We also have a Hedgehog who eats the Blackbird's food.

I have been counting birds now for this and that garden bird survey on and off since 1987. Although the various successive surveys have had slightly different methodologies, my own counts are what is known as raw, ie each count records actual numbers and is then converted to whatever records the survey demands. My records are therefore compatible over this long period. I say 'my', but it is Jean who always starts the week off on Sunday morning and usually provides the basis for the week's maximum figures. When Ian deigns to visit us, he stands for long hours at the kitchen window, thereby getting in his mother's way but also boosting the numbers. Viv just scorns the counts but is secretly interested and remarkably good at identification.

I recently analysed my counts into 2 periods. The first is a 3 year spell 1987-90, with the second being the 4 year period 1994-98. There are differences, but interpreting them is not easy. It is only one small garden and one in which vegetation has grown. Breeding birds are few. We have had irregular breeding of House Sparrows, Starling, Song Thrushes, Goldfinches, House Martins and maybe one or 2 others. The gardens in our street are also now mature and harbour other common species; Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, tits and Greenfinch fledglings occur.

The comonest bird is the House Sparrow, but nationally and locally it is in decline. I used to get over 60 birds in 1989, but now I'm lucky to see more than 30. Numbers peak in autumn with a smaller peak in spring. The former period is augmented by young birds and mid May sees the lowest numbers. This pattern is very different to that nationally, in which the peak is in the breeding season and lowest numbers in autumn. The latter is apparently because autumn flocks prefer farmland. Obviously my feeding stations are considered better than farmland! The next common species used to be Starling. Again this has declined drastically from my late 1980s numbers of up to 39 at the autumn peak to a measly 8 in recent years. This autumn peak is also at odds with national patterns. What worries me is that so much money is spent on conserving Ospreys (which are now safe and increasing), while no one is looking after the humble House Sparrow, which is now becoming a conservation alert species.

The Starling's place in the abundance stakes has been taken by the finches. Chaffinches have increased over the years, as they have done nationally, so that my peak reaches now up to 16 in late winter when natural food is scarcest. Minimum numbers occur in October for the opposite reason. Greenfinches are commoner than Chaffinches in some years, but show much variability. This probably depends on a good breeding season, with a peak following in the next winter. If that's the case, then 1994 and 1998 were poor breeding seasons and 1997 a good one. Similar population dynamics affect Siskins. They have also increased over the years, arriving in late December, peaking in February and all gone by May. The variation in winter feeding birds suggests a poor breeding season in 1995 and 1996 and, like the Greenfinch, a very good one in 1997.

Other species visiting in smaller numbers have also shown some changes. Song Thrushes are now much scarcer, with Woodpigeons commoner. I would rather see the former as pigeons hoover up the seed at an alarming rate!

Like many people, I have a garden bird list; one for the garden itself and one of birds seen or heard from the garden. The combined total now comes to around 74, of which 40 have occurred in the garden. Our front windows overlook the Eden valley which is a flightline for many species, including in the past Fulmars bound for Loch Leven and the neighbouring, now defunct, Benarty Hill Fulmar colony and Cormorant. Goosanders can be seen in winter and early spring flying up and down the river, while the often flooded fields harbour all sorts of gulls and inland waders. When Waxwings are here, they sometimes visit us and in summer we have had the occasional Lesser Whitethroat, overflying Tree Pipit and distant reeling Grasshopper Warbler. We have seen Buzzards steadily increase and we enjoy watching them soaring overhead in summer.

Some would say that garden birdwatching is not in the same league as many other forms of birding. Maybe not, but a long period of recording in any habitat is of greater value that merely watching, although one must enjoy it of course! The fact that there are 10,800 people including over 400 in Scotland now taking part in the BTO/CJ Wildbird foods Garden BirdWatch scheme testifies to its appeal and the value of that is inestimable. Why not try it if you do not do so already? I have copies of the handbook available; at £2 per copy it is an incredible bargain.

Norman Elkins

This was first published in the Fife Branch Newsletter. We are always interested in seeing local publications since they often contain articles that deserve a wider audience.

Wildlife crime

In the last 11 years nearly 40,000 illegally taken wild bird eggs have been seized by police. The UK's birds continue to suffer despite a higher prosecution rate in recent years. A bill with cross party support was introduced in the House of Commons in March by Jim Wallace, MP for Orkney and Shetland, urging the Government to introduce changes to the Wildlife and Countryside Act. RSPB has called for changes to the Act to include stronger deterrents for wildlife crimes including custodial sentences. Current penalties under the Wildlife and Countryside Act only give the courts recourse to fines which do not deter persistent offenders.

In the last 10 years there have been 82 prosecutions brought in connection with illegally taken wild bird eggs, some involving the same individuals. Custodial sentencing would also allow for penalties such as community service. In a number of recent Scottish cases Sheriffs have called for these extra powers. In 1996 there were 47 confirmed incidents involving nest robberies of either eggs or chicks. In 1997 this had increased to 94 incidents; 75 incidents are known about in 1998. From the egg collections police seized every year it is clear that many nest robberies go unreported. The rarest breeding birds are targeted most, especially birds of prey. Every year the nests of Ospreys, Goshawks and Peregrines are robbed. In 1998 2 nests of the White-tailed Eagle were robbed, threatening the success of efforts to reintroduce these birds to Scotland.

Siskin *Edmund Fellowes*

Charles Frank

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Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The beautifully renovated buildings of the Scottish Natural Heritage headquarters at Battleby, near Perth, set in attractive, bird filled wooded grounds, proved to be an ideal setting for the 1999 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference and over 165 participants from all over Scotland and as far afield as Hereford gathered in bright early spring sunshine for the event. We were able, after registration, to enjoy welcome hot refreshments and home baking and to explore the exhibitions, displays by local artists and stalls selling birdwatching equipment and accessories, before being called into the magnificent auditorium for the first session.

Upland birds

The theme of the conference this year was Upland Birds. This was very appropriate as, although the uplands and their birds have changed over the centuries, they are under more pressure today – from farming, forestry, shooting and recreational interests – than ever before. More change may be on the way with reform of the common agricultural policy of the EU, the new Scottish Parliament putting land reform on the political agenda, and the potential threat from global warming.

Nocturnal Wigeon

The 8 speakers gave an excellent overview of the changing face of the uplands and their birds, from the floors of the glens to the high tops. Judy Duncan began the first session with a highly entertaining account of her studies of a breeding colony of Wigeon, discovered serendipitously in Glen Clunie. Up to 15 pairs were present in some years, and the birds showed strong site fidelity and had good breeding success, despite losses to predators and adverse weather conditions. Nests had been difficult to find because the birds were most active after dark to avoid disturbance from traffic. Despite strenuous efforts only a limited number of birds – 7 females and 70 ducklings – have been ringed and the only clue to the birds' winter quarters was from a ring recovered from a female shot (and presumably eaten) in Norfolk.

Scrub

Simon Gillings of the British Trust for Ornithology talked about the birds of upland scrub. One of the major problems of the uplands is the high and increasing intensity of grazing which leads to the spread of grassland, and an impoverished bird community. Reduced grazing results in a return of heather and trees and an increase in bird numbers and diversity. Moorland species such as Meadow Pipits decline to be replaced by Whinchats, Tree Pipits, Willow Warblers, Chaffinches and, eventually, Redstarts and Treecreepers as woodland matures. Overall, increased woodland and scrub would in the long term benefit woodland birds including Black Grouse and Capercaillie, while the greatest negative effect would be on carrion feeders.

Wigeon *Photographer not known*

Ospreys

The second session began with a talk by Keith Brockie on Tayside Ospreys which, having been once exterminated through human persecution, had recolonised Perthshire in 1968. By 1998 there were 41 pairs, despite continuing persecution by egg collectors.

Keith described the efforts made to protect the birds over the years, from lopping limbs from nest trees to the use of razor wire, round the clock military surveillance and movement of nests. He said that the prospects for Ospreys were now good, and predicted further expansion in range and in numbers, perhaps to more than 100 pairs in Perthshire in the near future. Much of the credit for this success must be due to the protection the birds have received over the years from persecution and from themselves, given their seeming proclivity for building substandard nests in vulnerable locations.

Harriers

In contrast, Innes Sim had a less happy story to tell. The preliminary results of a survey of Hen Harriers throughout the UK indicated that in England and Wales numbers were low but stable, in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man numbers were increasing and in Scotland numbers were overall stable. This, however, masked different trends around the country. There was a slight increase in southern Scotland, decline in north and central Scotland, and a considerable decline in the species stronghold in Orkney. Hen Harriers breed on heather moorland and young plantations, and persecution is widespread and is implicated as a major factor behind the decline. Both breeding success and female survival are low on grouse moors compared with other habitats. The decline on Orkney is as yet unexplained as there Harriers are not molested.

Following the talks on 2 raptors experiencing very different fortunes, but both subject to continuing persecution, Patrick Stirling-Aird made a brief but eloquent presentation, describing how government and conservation agencies were under pressure to dilute protection for raptors, perhaps as a quid pro quo for acquiescence in land reform which might be proposed by the next parliament. He urged individuals and Scottish Ornithologists' Club branches to support other conservation organisations and to express their support for continued protection through the media and directly to the government.

Food for thought

Having been given food for thought, we all trooped off to lunch. Despite the difficulties in feeding everyone within one hour, we all eventually enjoyed a delicious buffet and returned refreshed for the afternoon sessions.

Chris Rollie, talking about Ravens in South West Scotland, began by demonstrating his deep knowledge of and affection for his subject, by reading a number of excerpts from the literature concerning the bird, and then impressed with his imitations of Raven calls. He then went on to describe how this formerly widespread species had suffered in the past through persecution, and, in the uplands, widespread afforestation. Populations are now increasing in the uplands, with a decline in persecution and maturing forests bringing an increase in food supplies, in the form of dead deer, goats and Rabbits.

Smaller birds

Dave Arthur spoke about his studies of Ring Ouzels in the Angus Glens, giving an overview of the species range and geographical variation, and describing this scarce and delightful bird's migration, feeding and nesting behaviour.

Survey work

Richard Bashford of the British Trust for Ornithology then described the new Breeding Bird Survey. The Common Bird Census had provided a mass of valuable data over the years but had some drawbacks. It was very time consuming, only covered woodland and farmland habitat and, because the sites were chosen by observers, had a strong bias towards the south east of Britain, where the majority of the population lives.

The Breeding Bird Survey is simpler to carry out. Because the survey squares are randomly allocated, a much wider range of habitats are covered and there is a better geographical spread with 300 out of 2700 squares in Scotland. Adequate data could be obtained for many widespread upland species for the first time, although very local or thinly distributed species such as Golden Eagle, Dotterel and Ptarmigan would still need to be the subject of specialist studies.

Ring Ouzel *Brian Turner*

Ptarmigan

Just such a study was then described by Stuart Rae, who showed his enthusiasm and affection for Ptarmigan by boldly stating that they were even better than Ravens. His talk, illustrated by stunning photography, described the birds 'unique 3 annual plumages, their food and habitat requirements and breeding behaviour. He urged everyone to get to know them better, not just to make one annual pilgrimage to the high tops for a year tick.

Collaboration for conservation

In his closing remarks Dr Jeremy Greenwood called for closer collaboration between different conservation organisations. The British Trust for Ornithology could provide scientific knowledge, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club local groups and focus and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds action for birds. There are new opportunities now that the government has included the health of wild bird populations in its indices of sustainable development.

Scotland has 3 globally threatened species – Red Kite, White-tailed Sea Eagle and Corncrake, and many other internationally important bird populations. Scotland has 32% of the UK land area, but only 9% of its people, most of them concentrated in the central belt. Scots form 7% of the membership of the BTO, but 16% of British ringers, indicating a higher degree of participation in active ornithology except, for some reason, in the Garden Bird Survey. He said that the BTO in Scotland was determined to ensure more coverage of Scottish birds and to pay more attention to Scottish priorities and he hoped that the proposed movement of a BTO presence in Scotland into joint offices at SOC headquarters would be of maximum advantage to Scottish birds.

James Whitelaw

The SOC Annual Conference is to be held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore over the weekend 29th/31st October 1999.

Debate on the future of the SOC

I have noted with interest that there has been no reaction to Rob Lambert's editorial to the November 1997 edition of the Fife newsletter, in which he took the SOC to task for not taking 'practical conservation steps' and for opting out of the 'rising tide of green consciousness'. He also compares the SOC with other organisations and measures our 'health' by the size of our membership: 2,400 as compared, for instance, with the RSPB in Scotland at nearly 53,000. But he is not comparing like with like. The SOC was founded as, and still is, a *club*. It is not, and never was intended to be, a 'nature conservation charity'.

A membership leaflet defines the club thus: "The SOC was formed in 1936 with the aim of encouraging ornithology in Scotland". The Constitution lists 6 objectives, the first of which sets the tone: 'to encourage and direct the study of Scottish ornithology in all its branches'. The other objectives are stated as coordination; cooperation between field and indoor workers; promotion of research; holding meetings for 'papers to be read, films exhibited and discussions held'; publishing of statistics and information and appointing of official recorders for all areas of Scotland. The only stated objective with a conservation purpose is 'd) to encourage the protection of the rarer Scottish breeding birds by such means as may be appropriate'.

Those of us who have grown up with the SOC, in my case of over 50 years now, also value very much the other meaning of the word 'club', which is a convivial meeting of like minded naturalists who share a common love of wild places and their bird life, and who talk the same language about field observations and the excitement of watching the behaviour of the commonest birds in depth and hunting for the rarities which adds spice to our lives. It is a specialist interest and it needs a club to bring together those who delight in birds for whatever reason to share their enthusiasm. Of course, the majority of members are aware of the threats to birdlife and concerned to play a part in bird protection but that is not and never has been the purpose of the 'club', nor should it be. The most valuable contribution any expert can make to conservation is to know what he or she is talking about as a matter of first hand experience and observation, from practice not theory. The SOC within its stated objectives and constitution possibly makes a stronger and more meaningful contribution to the conservation of birds in Scotland by providing accurate and well founded facts about the status of our birds than the 53,000 members of the RSPB ever will, however sincere and heartfelt their love of birds for their own sake.

Perhaps it is worth quoting from the Club Policy Review, chaired by John Arnott in July 1986: "It was agreed that the main object of the Club should be to provide for the needs of all birdwatchers in Scotland in a way which was attractive to them, *and to a greater extent than it is doing at present*.... It was agreed that the club should seek to increase the number of members, particularly among the young."

Rob Lambert is right to draw attention to this aspect of the club's activities and to the need to sell ourselves. But as what? As serious ornithologists or as twitchers whose passion for rarities and little else contributes nothing to our fundamental knowledge of the threats and dangers towards our birdlife? I too love the excitement of rare birds and have been known to encourage even a wild (Bean) goose chase; but in environmental terms it is a shocking example of wasted effort and petrol. Perhaps a more meaningful explanation of the failure of the SOC to expand is because so many birdwatchers are not really interested in birds as part of our heritage and an essential component of our ecology but as props to their egos. We must not confuse 'birding' with 'ornithology'. Birding is an indulgence but our club exists to foster something a lot more valuable and a lot less selfish. If the club can focus on promoting real birdwatching at every level, and especially the invaluable work done by the Atlas and similar surveys, then there is also room for a bit of fun and self indulgence. But the vision Rob calls for surely includes an understanding that ticklists may be good for improving our identification skills but our obsession with rarities is of little relevance for conservation.

Christopher Mylne

Dear Chris,

You are the only respondent so far to my debate on the future of the SOC. Let me explain what I sought to do. I wanted to

Barnacle Geese and Snow Goose M Owen

make a statement from younger SOC members, 30 and under, about the health of the club in the late 1990s and a vision for the twenty first century. One key issue that worries me is membership recruitment. The Fife Branch is lucky to bring in one student member a year and, sadly, this guarantees that the SOC keeps on getting older. The vision of 1936 that set up the club is too narrow for us to take into the next century. It is no use remaining 'a jolly old club' that merely 'promotes ornithology'. In fact, we need to rewrite the constitution and redefine our aims and objectives. We have to do something or the SOC will perish in the next 40 years. I do feel that the SOC needs to own small reserves, build hides, set up nature trails, speak out publicly on conservation issues at the local and national level, etc. so that members can be recruited because they feel that they are getting something tangible for their subscription. *Scottish Birds* is excellent but what popular appeal does it have? If we do not have new membership subscriptions coming in, the SOC will not survive. I sense we can change without compromising our founding objectives. Part of the solution lies in that dreadful phrase PR. How we publicise and sell ourselves is key and we do this poorly at present. We are not in the public eye as we need to be!. Our present membership level is a desperately poor reflection of our potential vitality, when compared with other Scottish based trusts and clubs of a similar nature. SOC total membership in March 1997 was 2,244; by March 1998 it had fallen to 2,177. Look at youth membership and you see our future crisis. In 1997 the SOC held just 58 Junior/Student members; a year later this figure had fallen to 46! In late 1997 YOC in Scotland had 13,292 members. Over 1997-98 all categories of SOC membership fell, save one, Pensioner membership. I have nothing but good wishes for the SOC but over the 11 years of my membership I have watched it fall into a deep decline. How can we halt this?

Rob Lambert

This has been abstracted from the Fife Branch Newsletter as the 2 contributions deal with important points. However, it is worth bearing in mind that these concerns have been aired in these pages and throughout the Club over many years. Your editor has sat through many of them including the Club Policy Review referred to by Chris Mylne. Experience demonstrates that any voluntary organisation will thrive or decline according to the input it gets from its members. Chris is right to emphasise that the SOC is a Club but that does not mean that we can be comfortable with the membership figures. However, attempts to expand which rely on rewriting the constitution, setting up committees or whatever will not achieve anything unless people themselves want to do things that will attract more members. By all means experiment, set up local hides, etc but do not expect this to be done for you - we have one full time staff member who is currently recovering from an operation, some part time help and a small number of volunteers to produce the publications, arrange conferences and programmes and run the office and library. If you want the SOC to expand go out and make it happen.

Stan da Prato

Capercaillie *Forestry Commission*

Islay goose shooting licence

Lord Sewel has decided to eject the RSPB and the WWT from the National Goose Forum which is considering options for managing the impact of geese on farmland and aiming to draw up a new compensation system. (See March 1999 *SBN*)

Horse of the Woods

In SBN March 1999 it was suggested that the Gaelic name for the Capercaillie derived from the horse like neighing of the last part of its display call. Many years ago I had occasion to do extensive research into all aspects of this magnificent bird, of which my personal experience remains minimal. The results were published in *British Birds* 51: 189-192 from which I quote:

"The name is derived directly from the Gaelic *capull* = horse, *coille* = of the wood. The horse element may seem out of place, but is probably used in a figurative sense meaning big cf Horseradish and horse lark, the latter a local name for the Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*. Curiously enough, a similar figurative use appears in the scientific name *urogallus, urus* = bull, *gallus* = cock, a parallel in English being found in the name Bullfinch.

It would require a very learned Gaelic scholar to say which of these 2 derivations was the more likely.

Dougal Andrew

REVIEWS

The Complete Illustrated Check List of the Birds of the World by Tim Westoll. *Glinger Publications* 1998 784 pp. ISBN 0-9533367-0-0 £39.99

This book claims to be the "most comprehensive and concise visual guide to every known species of the birds of the world". This is a mammoth undertaking and, with 367 full colour plates and over 10,000 species and subspecies listed on its 784 pages, the author has clearly put a great deal of effort into this work. Unfortunately the result does not reflect this. The choice of species seems to be somewhat arbitrary and does not always match current thinking, which makes it potentially misleading. The sequence in which they are presented is the Basel sequence of families which differs from the usual Voous order and there is no index of English names. This area is currently a bit of a minefield in ornithology, so it is a brave person indeed who publishes such a list independently in this way. The idea of illustrating all species is a commendable one, for even a thumbnail sketch can give an impression of a species. This has been achieved but, sadly, a lot of species look much the same – same outline, same proportions, same colours - and in many groups the head is too large, especially the birds of prey and small passerines. Others, such as the plate of divers and grebes, are rather comical.

Sadly Tim Westoll died in February this year at the age of 80. He had spent 30 years on this book. I am impressed by his commitment and stamina but feel unable to recommend this book either to dedicated listers or to novices.

Mark Holling

New World Blackbirds – The Icterids by Alvaro Jaramillo and Peter Burke. Helm Identification Guides. *Christopher Helm* 1999. 431 pp. ISBN 0-7136-4333-1 £35.

Another in the now familiar Helm Identification Guide series, this book covers the 103 members of the family *Icteridae*. All the species are found only in the Americas, with a small number, such as the Baltimore Oriole and the Bobolink, having been recorded as vagrants in Britain. Most SOC members will, therefore, not find much to interest them in this book, although the quality of the illustrations and the depth of information included in the text is up to the usual high standard now expected of the series. Recommended, but for those with a special interest only.

Mark Holling

The Raptors of Europe and The Middle East. A Handbook of Field Identification by Dick Forsman. *T & A D Poyser 1999* ISBN 0-85661-0989-4 £29.95

If you have ever felt the frustration of having quite good views of raptors in such places as Eastern Europe and the Middle East and still been uncertain if you have identified them correctly, this could be the book to carry on your next field trip to such areas. Dick Forsman has drawn on his own and other raptor enthusiasts great experience to produce another very good Poyser.

You will need to be reasonably strong as the high gloss quality paper needed for the reproduction of the very many high quality photographs and around 6-10 pages of text for each species results in a heavyweight field guide. For example *Birds of Europe* by Lars Jonsson covering most bird species in a similar geographical area weighs in at 900 gms compared to this book covering only raptors at 1400 gms.

Honey Buzzard *Ayrshire Bird Report*

The format seems very user friendly and the text concentrates on field characteristics such as plumage and shape and seems particularly useful in focusing on confusion species. Identification is aided by including a large number of superb photographs each illustrating some particular identification feature referred to in the text. An exception to this is Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* which is rather poorly illustrated (4 photographs) compared with Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (22 photographs).

Moult sequence, ageing and sexing and the many colour morphs are described and illustrated. Much of the information has been gleaned by Forsman from skins and by studying trapped birds and any ringer anticipating a raptor catching expedition will find this text invaluable.

This book is not simply a fieldguide, containing as it does a lot of other very interesting information as well as an extensive bibliography. Be careful as you could well find that you miss the raptor overhead as you become engrossed in the text!

Alan Heavisides

A Naturalist's Shetland by J Laughton Johnston. *T & A D Poyser* 1999 506 pp. ISBN 0-85661-105-0 £27.95

This is an excellent book! Coming from the Poyser stable it is superbly produced and a joy to use; but even more importantly, the book is beautifully balanced. Clearly written by someone who loves Shetland, Laughton Johnston covers all aspects in an easy style which encompasses a tremendous amount of fascinating material. Out of 506 pages, nearly 200 at the back cover an extensive bibliography; list all the birds, mammals, insects and plants as well as more obscure taxa; suggest 100 places to visit when on holiday in Shetland, and include a glossary of local words which are used extensively throughout the book. Excellent.

The main part of the book covers the geology, man's colonization and its effects on the soil, vegetation and landuse, followed by chapters on fishing, seabirds, Fair Isle, Shetland naturalists, the coming of oil and finally suggestions as to what the future may hold via sustainability.

The photographs have been very carefully chosen, many showing the changes that have occurred while John Busby's drawings are most evocative and, for me, add much to this book. If you have ever visited and enjoyed Shetland, are planning to visit, or want a good read about a fascinating group of islands and its people, then buy this book. You will not be disappointed.

Frank Hamilton

***The Birds of Prey of Australia* – a field guide** by Stephen Debus. *OUP Melbourne* 1998. 152 pp ISBN 0 19 550624 3 £11.95

Although it is pocket sized, unlike many recent publications purporting to be field guides, this one fails to match the expected requirements in other ways. Each of the 26 species described has about 4 or 5 pages of text which includes sketches of flight silhouettes, display attitudes, and accounts of behaviour and breeding biology. In addition to photographs, excellent full page plates show paintings of underside, upperside and perched views of juvenile, immature and adult plumages for all the Australian raptors. Sadly, the text and illustrations are seldom near to each other and are not cross referenced in either location. There is no index. Consequently as a field guide it would be frustrating to use.

Neville Crowther

Letter to the Editor

The other day in early March a Blackcap was singing in the Gullane Sea Buckthorn bushes where you used to hang your mist nets and your nice wife used to feed my dog. These are the things that one does not forget!

Dougal Andrew

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REQUESTS

Milennium Seabird Survey

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in conjunction with the RSPB, has launched the start of the third national seabird census (Seabird 2000). The aim is to provide a comprehensive and accurate account of the status of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland. New surveying techniques to be used during the project should improve current knowledge of seabird species which are difficult to monitor, including the British population of Storm Petrels, for which current estimates range from 70,000 to 250,000 pairs.

Seabird 2000 will run from April 1999 to July 2001 and be carried out by a combination of regional coordinators working with skilled volunteers and experts from the funding partners.

Anyone interested in taking part should contact **Seabird 2000 Project Coordinator, Dr Ian Mitchell, telephone 01224 655717** for further information.

Fauna of Britain Project

The objective of this project is to discover and chronicle the many ways in which the wild animal life of Britain has become interwoven with human culture, history and folklore. It will embrace all animals groups, including insects, fish, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. The kind of information being sought is:

Do you know about particular customs, festivals or traditions that celebrate or mark individual types of animal?
Does a local ceremony or tradition involve animals in some other way?
Have individual animals or groups of animals achieved fame and passed into local folklore or perhaps even inspired literature, music or poetry?
Is your town or village named after a particular animal and do you know why or when the name originated?
Is there an animal named after the place where you live, like the Dartford Warbler?
Does the coat of arms of your local town or region include a wild animal?
Are particular animals known locally by special, regional names?

Please contact: **Fauna of Britain, PO Box 392, Twickenham TW1 1XQ or e-mail on: fauna@hamlyn.co.uk.**
You can find more information regarding this study by visiting the webs page at **www.hamlyn.co.uk/fauna.**

Please send all information typed, if possible, and give as much detail as you can. Do not forget to include your name, address, contact number and e-mail address, if you have one. All your contributions are welcome and every organisation involved will be credited in the book.

Migration through the Strait of Gibraltar monitoring scheme

The Strait of Gibraltar is the most important bottle neck for central and western European migratory birds crossing the Mediterranean. This area is specially important for soaring birds such as storks, vultures and eagles.

The Regional Government of Andalucia is funding for a period of 5 years, the monitoring of autumn migration of soaring birds. Coordination of field work is done by the Spanish partner of BirdLife International (*Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologia*).

From mid July to mid October different observatories are placed along the Spanish migration front of the Strait of Gibraltar each year and volunteers are needed to cover them. Volunteers will be selected according to their own experience, time and knowledge. Food and accommodation will be fully covered by the *Junta de Andalucia* and minimum periods of 12 or 15 days of stay are required.

Volunteers will be asked for a brief cv (not necessary for participants in previous MIGRES campaigns) and details about preferred dates. For registration and information:

Programa MIGRES, Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologia, C/Miguel Bravo Ferrer, 25 bajo, E-41005 Sevilla. Phone & fax: +34 95 464 42 94. E-mail: migres@seo.org.

Programa MIGRES, Huerta Grande, Parque Natural Los Alcornocales, Ctra. Nacional N-340, km 96. Phone: +34 956 67 91 61.,

Also by e-mail from the local environmental administration **Delegacion Provincial de la Consejeria de Medio Ambiente en Cadiz:sv.e.ca@cma.junta-andalucia.es.**

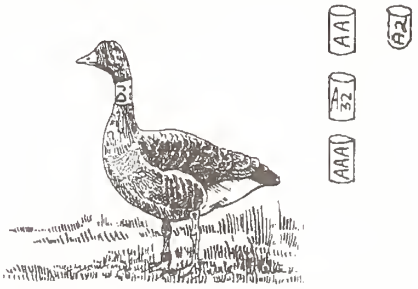
Darvic ringed Oystercatchers
See *SBN* 50

Colour ringed Shags
See *SBN* 50

Breeding origins of Scottish Barnacle Geese - DNA samples required
See *SBN* 51

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329).**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Reed Warblers in Scotland

I am carrying out a review of possible breeding records for Reed Warblers in Scotland. If anyone has any records of a bird/birds in suitable habitat then please get in touch with me. I am particularly interested in hearing of any records in July or August. All contributions will be acknowledged in publication. **Derek Robertson, Woodlands, Bandrum, nr Carnock, Fife KY12 9HR. (01383 852997)**

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1999 were:-

January – 1st £30 Mrs S Craig, Falkirk; 2nd £20 Mrs S N Denney, Glasgow; 3rd £10 R C Welland, Dunbarton

February – 1st £50 J H Ballantyne, Edinburgh; 2nd £30 Dr K C R Halliday, New Galloway; 3rd £20 Mrs N Stabler, Inveresk; 4th £10 D Mackenzie, Peterhead.

March – 1st £30 not claimed; donated to 200 Club funds; 2nd £25 Miss R M Glen, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 R M Sellers, Nailsworth, Glos.; 4th £10 Dr M C Keith, Edinburgh.

All who rejoined on 1 June for the 200 Club's eleventh year are very warmly thanked for their continued support, which is very gratefully acknowledged by Council. Only some £90 was spent in the past year, on repairs to the Club's projector and a stand, and for a new door in the lower library. The rest has been retained in the 200 Club account until the SOC ask for it. For information about joining the 200 Club, please contact me, **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH (01896 822176).**

SOC – Ayrshire Branch trips

Thank you for advertising our trip to Sri Lanka. This worked exceptionally well and helped to increase numbers for this tour to 17. We could, in fact, have taken more people, but we felt this was a reasonable maximum. There is always the possibility of a second trip of course. So, apart from our Ayrshire members, we have now added SOC members from Broughty Ferry, Loanhead, Jedburgh, New Galloway and Croydon to the list of those travelling with us. May I ask you to mention our forthcoming Branch trips which other members may well be interested in. We are hoping to get as many participants as possible locally, by bringing together people from other birdwatching groups in the area.

Here are the forthcoming events:

Day trip to the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair at Vane Farm, Saturday 4 September 1999. Coach leaves Ardrossan 07.20 and will collect en route to Ayr (08.00) and then on to Vane Farm for 10.30 hours with a coffee stop en route. Depart 16.30 for a shoreline walk at South Queensferry, towards Cramond, followed by a pub meal in South Queensferry. Back in Ayr for around 21.00 hours and then Ardrossan. Can collect at other points en route, such as Kilmarnock, East Kilbride, Hamilton.

Cost £12.50 for the coach plus £4 entry to the Fair, plus pub meal. Cost of transport depends on pick up point.

October School Holiday*, Saturday 9 to Saturday 16 October 1999. Late autumn migration in **Cyprus**. One week birdwatching and sightseeing on Aphrodite's Isle with Angus Hogg. Tour arranged by Tony and Gerda Scott. The cost of £650 will include coach connection to Manchester Airport from Ayrshire, arriving for the 15.20 hours flight to Paphos. Return flights, all transport provided by Oberon Excursions Ltd on the island of Cyprus. Bed and breakfast at the Marion Hotel in Polis for 3 nights and the King's Hotel in Paphos for 4 nights. Picnic lunches included. (Those travelling to Manchester from other areas would have the cost of the coach deducted, making the fare ca £610.)

Visiting the Akamas Peninsula, Latchi, Paphos Hill Villages, Avgas Gorge, Lara Bay, Ayios Yeorios, Paphos Headland, The Mosaic Houses and Tombs of the Kings, Phassouri Marsh, Akrotiri Salt Lake, Griffon Vultures at Kensington Cliffs, Temple of Apollo, Ancient Kourion, Asprokremnos Dam, Troodhos and Pitsilia Villages. There will be alternative trips offered most days for those who wish to see something in addition to birds. Angus will be leading the bird trips daily and either Tony or Gerda will be doing the Classical Tours.

Those interested in any of the outings should telephone **Tony or Gerda Scott on 01292 281085 or write to them at 4 Hilltop Place, Ayr KA7 3PB** for a full itinerary. Early booking would be appreciated due to scarcity of flights. **E-mail; das.in.touch@zetnet.co.uk.**

For the **Year 2000** we are organising a weekend in **Dublin,** A mix of city life and birdwatching in the area by coach but with flights to Dublin itself from Prestwick. This is due to take place at the February half term.

Tony and Gerda Scott

*Note: *School holidays vary from council to council so check with your local schools if your holidays are linked to the school terms.*

Editor

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Thanks

I would like to express sincere thanks to all members who very kindly sent good wishes following my recent operation, I would also like to thank all the volunteers too numerous to mention who have struggled to look after the office during my absence. Many thanks once again.

Sylvia Laing

Publications

This issue of SBN is 12 rather than the usual 16 pages. This is linked to Sylvia's absence as much of our material has to be chased up and the volunteers who have been holding the fort have not been able to do all that Sylvia normally does, despite heroic efforts especially by Joan Wilcox who has done all the word processing. Members could help by sending in more contributions though please note we have to edit these often at quite short notice.

Scottish Birds, June 1999 is being prepared but will be issued with the next issue of *SBN* in August/September.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks to the volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace to assist in sending out the March mailing. They were: Keith Macgregor, Elisabeth Law, Bob & Betty Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Noreen Stabler, Angus and Chris Smith, John Davies. Neville Crowther, Ethel Russell, Roger Brewer, John Law and Sue Goode.

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Assisted by Sylvia Laing and
Joan Wilcox

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NEWS

The 1999 breeding season in Scotland

This popular feature is put together at ultra short notice in mid July and relies on the first impressions of some members; it is not a definitive account. As in previous years we stress that this article is no substitute for the many detailed analyses that will provide a more accurate picture. The results of the Breeding Bird Survey from 1994-98 appear on page 3.

Song Thrush *Jim Young*

The weather

Details of spring and early summer weather were kindly provided by our resident weather man, Norman Elkins. April was warmer than normal for the whole country (1°C above normal). It was dry in the east but wetter and windier in the west. Sunshine was average in most areas. Winds were generally from the south west with a northerly spell in mid month and easterlies in the last week. May was again warmer than normal although wetter in most areas, especially in the west, but drier in north east Scotland. Sunshine was close to normal. Winds were predominately easterly except for the fourth week. June temperatures and sunshine were both near normal in the east but lower than normal in the west. It was wetter than average in most areas, especially north west Scotland.

Small birds

Reports from a number of areas indicate that Spotted Flycatchers bred in higher numbers this year, after several years of decline.

A study area in central Scotland for Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts showed that both species have had the poorest season since the study began 25 years ago, with many complete broods dying. Adults appeared to have had difficulty in feeding young, This was also noted in the southwest of Scotland. Redstarts in the same area were down by 30%. However, fledging success for those that were successful appeared to be reasonable, with above average numbers being recorded in Easter Ross. Predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers was also noted for both species. A number of reports suggest an increase in the numbers of some summer migrants although Willow and Wood Warblers suffered increased predation at nests. Reed Warblers are now being reported from several lochs in southwest Scotland.

Meadow Pipits appear to be down in a number of areas. Tree Pipits may be increasing around Inverness. Several pairs of Stonechats have been reported from parts of the Moorfoots. A further survey of Twites in Orkney confirmed a continued decline in the species.

Nuthatches have been recorded for the first time in one CBC plot in Midlothian, and continue to increase around Innerleithen and Jedburgh.

A welcome increase in the number of Song Thrushes has been recorded in many parts of Scotland, also in decline overall in the UK, Skylarks may be on the increase. A long running nest box study of Tree Sparrows in Perthshire reported numbers down on 98 with only 3 third broods being recorded at this stage, while Easter Ross still has a healthy population. The increase in House Sparrows which started about 5 years ago in the southwest continues. Goldfinch numbers continue to increase in a lot of areas. Bullfinches appear to have been reasonably successful in parts of Perthshire. A possible eruption of Crossbills was noted in late June with large numbers around in small coastal woods in Easter Ross.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Green Woodpeckers were in good numbers in several areas.

House Martins bred in good numbers in some areas. Swifts were down in parts of Edinburgh. A late season would appear to be normal for Swallows but overall numbers are reported to be fairly high. Nightjars remain stable or have slightly increased in south west Scotland.

Water birds and waders

There were numerous reports of a poor season for most waders. Breeding success at Vane Farm was not as good as 1998 though numbers of Lapwings increased from 23 to 32 pairs, Snipe from 6 to 11 pairs and Redshank from 4 to 5, In south west Scotland, Curlews were recorded leaving breeding areas before the end of June with many nests lost during a very wet spell. However, this seems to have benefited Snipe with birds still displaying into July.

A man has been charged in the Outer Hebrides for allegedly disturbing one of the few pairs of nesting Red-necked Phalaropes.

Mandarin Ducks are still increasing in Highland. In Orkney, Pochard, Pintail and Gadwall are all reported to have bred on some islands for the first time. Mute Swans are still increasing at more upland sites in the Borders. A number of Mallard broods were lost early in the season; late broods are now starting to appear.

Many old Grey Wagtail sites have been reoccupied in one area and Dippers appear to have done extremely well.

A survey of Water Rails in the Borders has been extremely successful and has revealed at least 100 territories.

The only report of Little Grebes was of a brood that must have hatched in mid April and had fledged by mid June. Inland Common and Black-headed Gull colonies have been badly hit by the cold wet weather in parts of Scotland with many chicks dying before fledging.

Predators

Buzzard nests appear to have had more failures than normal with some broods being 2-3 weeks late although overall impressions are that Buzzards are still increasing throughout most of Scotland. Persecution is still a major problem in several areas particularly with Hen Harriers. A further decrease has been reported from Orkney although breeding success among those that did breed was up on 1998. Harriers on North Uist and Benbecula appear to be doing alright, however a complete absence on South Uist is causing concern. Merlin had a mixed season with below average occupation recorded from some areas.. Peregrines have had a very poor season in most areas. One almost successful brood was suspected of being eaten by Pine Martens. Kestrels had a late start to the breeding season. Golden Eagles had an average season in some areas. Osprey pairs continued to increase in Tayside but poor weather has resulted in a 44% nest failure rate, however an average of 2.2 young per successful nest has so far been recorded, with 4 pairs now nesting on pylons and another pair which had previously nested in a tree now using an electricity pole. Egg collectors still pose problems in some areas.

Osprey nest between 2 electricity poles
Keith Brockie

Owls had a season of mixed fortunes. Vole populations were low over the winter in the south west but increasing numbers suggest Barn Owls may yet have a reasonable season. Tawny Owls on the other hand appear to have been badly hit in most areas with low occupation rates and small clutch sizes. Short-eared Owls were seen early in the season in south Scotland but have since disappeared, and numbers are well down on '97 and '98 in Orkney. One pair of Long-eared Owls bred successfully in the Western Isles.

While Ravens continue to increase in south west Scotland a nest of young was shot in North Uist and below average success recorded in central Scotland and west Perthshire. Hooded Crows on South Uist continue to be heavily persecuted. Magpies continue to spread into south Ayrshire.

Seabirds

In the north of Scotland it was noted that Herring, Great Black-backed Gulls and Shags were approximately 2 to 3 weeks later than normal and evidence suggests a drop in numbers. In Orkney, seabird numbers at this stage would appear to be reasonable. The number of Shag nests on Inchkeith in the Firth of Forth increased during 1999.

Shags, Auks and Kittiwakes continue to increase in Easter Ross but poor breeding success is reported; some were still incubating into the second week of June in some areas. Fulmars continue to decline in some areas of north east Scotland.

The population of Puffins on the Shiants may now be greater than that of St Kilda.

Mink are having a devastating effect on the Arctic Tern colonies in the Outer Hebrides. The fourth breeding record of Sandwich Terns in the Outer Hebrides is of one pair in with a Common Tern colony. An aerial count of roof nesting Herring Gulls at Inverness in mid June revealed just over 100 pairs, less than half the number counted 4 years ago.

In the Western Isles Eider appear to have had a reasonable season; this was also noted in the north of Scotland.

Gamebirds

Black Grouse numbers at a number of known leks continued to drop. A report from west Perthshire indicates that Red Grouse, despite having come through the winter in reasonable numbers, have not had a good breeding season.

One walker reported many Ptarmigan broods in the east Cairngorms.

This article has been put together with the help of a large number of fieldworkers and recorders who have taken the trouble at a very busy time of year to fill us in on their observations. This year we would like to thank Keith Brockie, Tom Dougall, Norman Elkins, Sandra Hacker, Cliff Henty, Angus Hogg, Mark Holling, Hugh Insley, Alex Joss, Sylvia Laing, Donnie Macdonald, Eric Meek, Ray Murray, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Brian Rabbitts, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Dominic Sargent, Geoff Shaw, Ken Shaw, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Smith, Bobby Smith and Bob Swann.

Footnote: The photo of the Osprey nest which illustrates this article was unfortunately struck by lightning at 2000hrs on 1 August with the loss of at least one chick.

Sylvia Laing

The BBS perspective on Scottish breeding birds 1994-1998

The new BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) annual report was published this month and goes to all volunteers taking part in the scheme. Although the report details the progress and results of the scheme for the whole UK, the design of the BBS allows specific data to be selected from different countries or habitats. We are now able to report on Scottish population changes alongside those for the UK.

Since the BBS began in 1994 more and more people have taken part and now around 2300 1x1km squares are surveyed each year. In Scotland, over 300 squares are surveyed annually, allowing us to look at population changes in many common and widespread Scottish birds.

The table lists 60 species recorded in more than 20 squares. The more squares a species is recorded in, the more accurately we can monitor them. As we gather more data from the same squares, population trends for most common birds should become apparent. The figures in the table should be treated as preliminary because the confidence limits for species recorded in less that 100 squares are often quite large. These changes are mainly due to annual difference in environmental conditions such as cold or wet weather. Significant differences were found for only 3 species, increases for Wren and Robin and a decrease for Blue Tit. By far the best way of using this data is to identify the long term trends just starting to appear after 5 years of the survey.

Looking at the table in detail, the wide range of species covered by the BBS suggests that the survey is not only successful in covering a variety of habitats, but is providing much needed information about Scottish birds. For some species, population trends in Scotland mirror those for the UK as a whole. These include significant declines in Oystercatcher, Lapwing and Black-headed Gull and a significant increase in Red Grouse. In other species, such as Pheasant and Wood Pigeon, Scottish populations are doing worse than those in other parts of the UK.

The breeding season report in *SBN 47* mentioned that Cuckoo numbers appeared to be high in 1997. The results from the Scottish BBS confirm the increasing trend for Cuckoos in Scotland, which contrasts with their significant decline in the UK as a whole, although we will have to wait a few years to see if this apparent increase in Scotland becomes significant. By selecting the BBS survey squares at random, a good number are located in the uplands. We hope this will enable us to get a handle on the

Population changes in breeding birds in Scotland for species recorded in 20 or more BBS squares for 1997-98 and 1994-98. Asterisks denote statistically significant changes.

Species	Sample	Change 1997-98	Change 1994-98
Grey Heron	37	-17	61*
Mallard	79	5	14
Buzzard	84	22	12
Kestrel	44	44	-15
Red Grouse	60	33	44*
Grey Partridge	26	8	67
Pheasant	95	-3	-22*
Oystercatcher	113	5	-18*
Golden Plover	51	7	4
Lapwing	83	-6	-28*
Snipe	55	22	32
Curlew	124	8	-10
Redshank	21	-17	-19
Common Sandpiper	38	6	2
Black-headed Gull	74	-24	-58*
Common Gull	70	-14	0
Lesser Black-backed Gull	56	-32	38
Herring Gull	95	-1	30
Feral Pigeon	47	32	29
Wood Pigeon	149	-4	-21*
Collared Dove	33	46	0
Cuckoo	69	1	13
Swift	36	44	-28
Skylark	195	-6	4
Swallow	122	34	1
House Martin	35	-15	111*
Tree Pipit	27	10	51*
Meadow Pipit	206	11	7
Grey Wagtail	22	114	-29
Pied Wagtail	113	39	46*
Wren	170	75*	84*
Dunnock	90	23	33*
Robin	146	47*	22*
Wheatear	78	11	65*
Blackbird	135	21	-3
Song Thrush	123	34	17
Mistle Thrush	56	48	28
Sedge Warbler	45	-16	-4
Whitethroat	50	21	25
Blackcap	22	31	83*
Willow Warbler	176	11	65*
Goldcrest	70	17	91*
Coal Tit	98	8	36*
Blue Tit	111	-37*	-16
Great Tit	96	-2	33*
Magpie	29	-5	47
Jackdaw	84	6	15
Rook	95	69	65*
Carrion Crow	143	-10	-4
Raven	40	48	42

Linnet at the nest

Jim Young

Starling	111	52	49*
House Sparrow	68	6	-3
Chaffinch	190	9	21*
Greenfinch	73	-8	12
Goldfinch	51	-28	6
Siskin	61	-24	3
Linnet	72	18	60*
Bullfinch	28	76	202*
Yellowhammer	82	-2	-7
Reed Bunting	38	27	17

populations of upland species such as Meadow Pipit and Skylark. At present, both species are recorded from an excellent number of squares so we can be confident with the results showing counts of both to be stable. For the Skylark, this contrasts with the significant decline across the UK as a whole. Last year's *SBN* report suggested that Willow Warbler were doing well in Scotland. This is borne out by BBS results in Scotland and the UK. Another species, the Song Thrush, appears to be faring better in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but it is a little too early to be confident in these results. Other results from Scotland that contrast with those from the UK include trends for Starling, Linnet and Bullfinch which appear to be doing well in Scotland but are declining significantly across the UK.

Thanks to the tremendous interest in the Scottish BBS and support among birdwatchers, we are able to produce the important results outlined here. It is vital that we maintain this level of coverage if we are to continue to collect this valuable data for Scotland's birds. At present around 50% of all BBS squares issued in Scotland are covered meaning that there are many spare squares that we are keen to find volunteers for. We realise that the random nature of square selection means that some of these may be too remote to reach but we are keen that all accessible squares are covered. Since the scheme began, RSPB professional fieldworkers have covered around 15% of all Scottish squares, particularly in the remoter parts of the Highlands. In recent years, we have been successful in finding fieldworkers for these squares but our main concern following the 1998 season is the cessation of funding to hire fieldworkers. This support was provided for the first 5 years of the survey, to give time for the BBS to be promoted to potential volunteers. We are very keen to hear from potential volunteers in these areas.

As one would expect, most support comes from the well populated areas of Scotland but there are a good number of volunteers taking part in more remote areas. The SOC is a strong supporter of the BBS and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all members for their help in making the survey such a success.

If you would like to help please contact **Richard Bashford, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU. Tel 01842 750050, Fax 01842 750030, or e-mail r.bashford@bto.org**

Hen Harrier survey

In June the results of the 1998 Hen Harrier survey were published. This work was carried out by a number of organisations. Although organised by the RSPB in Scotland, it was instigated by the Government's Raptor Working Group. A comparison with previous surveys between 1988 and 1994 shows that despite harrier numbers in Orkney showing significant declines those for the rest of Scotland showed little change. This survey clearly shows that overall Hen Harrier numbers are not increasing in Scotland contrary to some suggestions. The decline in the harrier population in Orkney is worrying, and the RSPB is jointly funding research with ITE and Aberdeen University to examine the reasons for this. It could be related to a reduction in number of Orkney voles due to the loss of grassland. In Orkney it was thought to be voles which are the key prey items for harriers.

Hen Harrier (prs)	**1998**	**1988-94**
Orkney	34	71
Scotland	402	408
England	19	18
Wales	28	27
N Ireland	38	10
UK Total	521	534

Substitute feeding of Hen Harriers on grouse moors

During the spring and summer of 1998 Hen Harriers on Langholm Moor were the subject of a study in which they were provided with substitute food in an attempt to divert them from preying on grouse. Initial results are encouraging, and published by the Moorland Working Group.

Male harriers start returning to the breeding grounds in good weather from March. Once territories have been established it should be possible to erect suitable perchs near the centre of each territory on which to place the substitute food. In summer, this perch should be moved to around 20 metres from the nest.

Two types of carrion were placed on these perches daily: day old poultry chicks weighing about 40grams and white rats weighing 160grams. These 2 foods differ in calorific values with the rat being nutritionally the better. At Langholm, the harriers seemed to prefer poultry chicks although dangers with this type of food mean that any uneaten food must be removed the following day. It may be possible in some areas to use wild rabbits; these should not have been shot as the risk of lead ingestion could have serious implications for the harriers. It is also illegal to provide live prey.

On average the male feeds the female 3 times a day with offerings such as vole or Meadow Pipit each weighing between 25-40grams. Studies of captive birds show that they consume 19% of their body weight per day. An average female in the spring would require approximately 150grams of food per day. However once she has started to incubate feeding should be suspended partly to prevent the attraction of other predators to the area. It should also be noted that corvids will take advantage of this unnatural food supply, and therefore the amount of feeding should be increased to account for this. Most harriers take substitute food either early in the morning or just before roosting at dusk.

After the chicks have hatched substitute food should again be put out in increasing amounts over the next 5 weeks to minimise the number of grouse chicks taken. It was noted at Langholm that male birds continued to deliver wild prey to the nest although this was rarely grouse. If feeding was not carried out in the spring, there is a strong possibility that summer feeding alone will be less successful. At Langholm, birds which had been fed in the spring took 88% of the food items back to the nest whereas harriers that were not fed in spring only took 56% back to the nest. Food requirements of harrier broods vary according to age and number of young. If feeding is continued beyond 5 weeks it could lead to the young birds staying in the areas for longer before dispersing.

The booklet **Substitute feeding of Hen Harriers on Grouse Moors; a practical guide is in the SOC Waterston Library.**

Hen Harrier *Don Smith*

Charles Frank

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Charles Frank
The Friendly Optical Experts

Fish eating birds and fisheries

Dave Carss and Mick Marquiss of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology discuss some of the main findings of a recent Scottish Office report detailing research into fish eating birds and Salmonids in Scotland undertaken by ITE, Banchory and the Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory (FFL), Faskally.

Controvesy

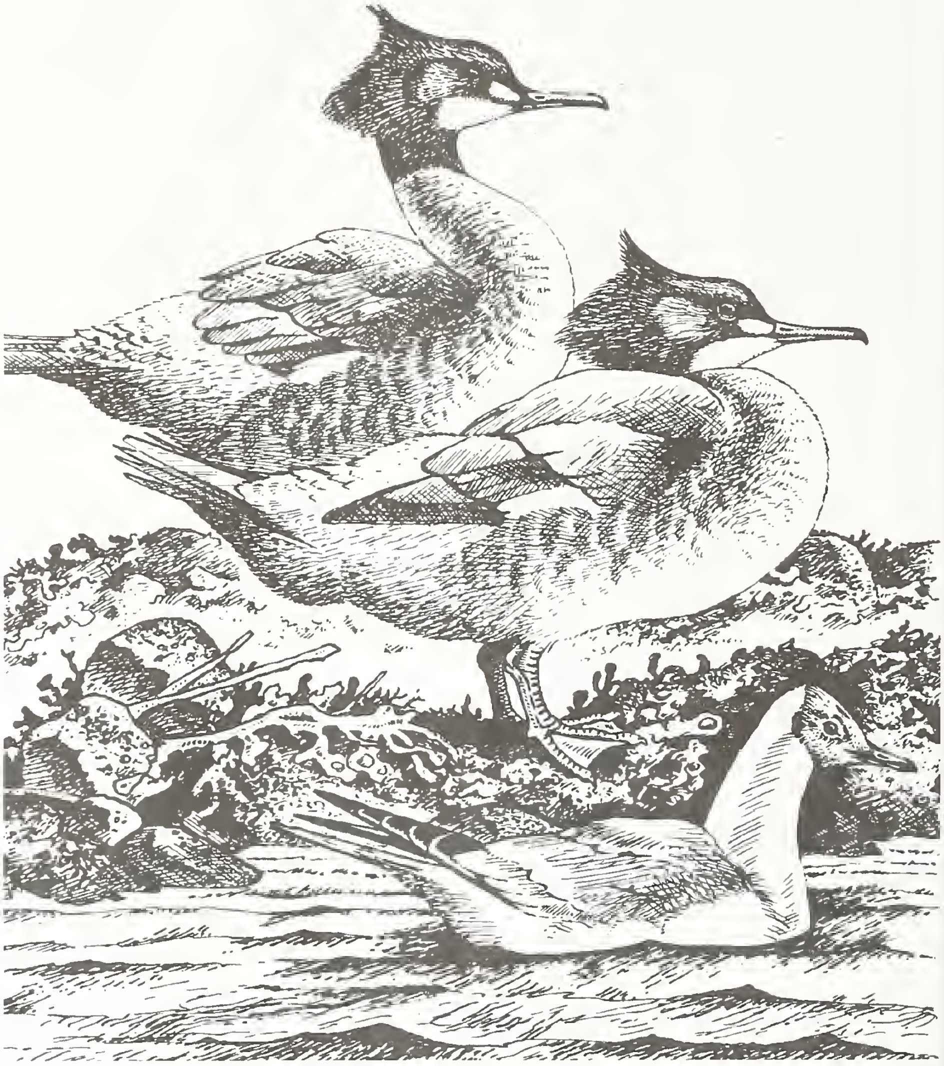
Many readers of *SBN* will be aware of the controversy surrounding fish eating birds and fisheries and the common perception that birds are damaging to fisheries. In Scotland this debate is sharply focused on the Atlantic Salmon, due to its decline. Such a decline should trouble us all. The Salmon is seen by many as an indicator of the health of aquatic ecosystems. Salmon related income, often vital to rural economies, can be measured in millions of pounds, and the leaping Salmon is recognised, like the thistle, as a Scottish icon throughout the world. Goosanders, Red-breasted Mergansers and Great Cormorants too are part of our natural heritage and are regarded by birdwatchers, and the public alike, as an integral part of Scotland's aquatic habitats.

Licences

In his foreword to the report, Dick Shelton, Officer in Charge, FFL gives a succinct overview of the Scottish situation. Here, as elsewhere, bird predation is widely believed to be one of the factors reducing the numbers of fish available for subsequent exploitation. All 3 species of bird are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act but may be shot under licence from the Scottish Office for the purpose of preventing serious damage to fisheries. Licences, currently only granted where alternative non lethal methods are unsuccessful or impractical, are issued on 2 premises. First, that sectors of the fish population preyed upon by birds have limited capacity to compensate for losses through density dependent changes in the growth and survival of the remaining fish. Second, that all 3 birds species have a value of their own and that shooting be organised so that fishery resources are protected adequately but with due regard to the conservation status of the birds.

Constraints

The foreword also provides a useful definition: *for species with such a high unit value as Atlantic Salmon, any uncompensated losses may be regarded as 'serious'*. For migratory fish, such as Salmon and Sea Trout, habitat constraints during the freshwater phase of the life cycle (the fry, parr and smolt stages) set upper limits on their numbers. Whether this limit is reached depends on both the number of adults returning to spawn and the fate of their progeny in freshwater. The capacity for compensation is diminished as juvenile life proceeds and is probably lost entirely by the smolt stage when young fish enter the sea. Large parr are thought to be most vulnerable to predation when they undergo migratory movements in autumn and early winter and smolts during their seaward migration in spring.



Sawbills *David Mitchell*

It is obvious that the key questions are: How many birds are there? What species, sizes and quantity of fish do they eat? How many fish are there? What is the size and structure of their population and the likely consequence of bird predation? The report attempts to answer these questions, most specifically for sawbill ducks and Salmon.

Bird abundance and diet

The abundance of sawbill ducks was measured by ITE on the Rivers Dee (Aberdeenshire) and North Esk. Birds were most abundant on the lower section in winter, on the upper mainstem and lower tributaries in spring, and on the mainstem duckling nursery areas in mid summer. Between 1987-94, the spring numbers of both species declined on both rivers, probably as a result of less food in wintering areas elsewhere. Summer duckling numbers varied more than twofold, apparently reflecting duckling survival during the week after hatching. Wintering numbers on rivers were lower than at other times of year but were remarkably similar over all years.

Bird diet was assessed from the stomach contents of over 1500 birds shot under licences by fisheries managers (1990-96) and forwarded to ITE for analysis. Sawbills and Cormorants are generalist predators; their diet throughout Scotland is diverse and varies between seasons and sites. Although they most commonly took Brown Trout, Salmon parr, Eels and Minnows, other species sometimes predominated: Three spined Stickleback, Stone Loach, Lamprey and Flounder (taken by Mergansers), Lamprey, Stone Loach and Frogs (Goosanders), Grayling, Roach and Flounder (Cormorants on rivers), and Perch and Rainbow Trout (Cormorants on stillwaters).

A major finding was that, in the north, the diet of all 3 birds was less diverse with a greater proportion of Salmon than in the south. In winter and spring, Red-breasted Merganser diet averaged about 30% Salmon by mass on southern rivers and 56% in the north. Equivalent figures for Goosanders were 9% and 41%, and for Cormorants, less than 1% and 18%. Interestingly, although Trout was a greater dietary component than Salmon in all 3 birds, its proportion showed no discernible latitudinal trend.

The work also dispels the myth that birds take mostly Salmon smolts. The Salmon taken by Mergansers averaged 83mm, less than that for Goosanders (92mm) and Cormorants (101mm), suggesting that most were parr. This finding has important implications for estimates of the impact of predation on fish populations.

Fish consumption and impact

It was possible to calculate the consumption of Salmon on the Dee and North Esk using bird abundance and dietary data, in conjunction with published estimates of their daily food intake. The numbers of Salmon consumed by ducks were then compared with the best available data on Salmon densities provided by FFL. This suggested that, at the highest observed densities, sawbills could consume up to 0.3% of the Salmon standing stock per day on narrow (<30m) river sections and 2.4% on wider sections.

While the report's authors agree that, under some circumstances, fish eating birds can consume large numbers of Trout and Salmon, estimates of impact remain unrealistic; the calculations imply that sawbills on the Dee in summer would remove all the Salmon within 2 months. As this clearly does not happen, either the estimates of consumption are too high and/or the estimates of Salmon stocks are too low, or the Salmon population is somehow able to compensate for this apparently high level of predation.

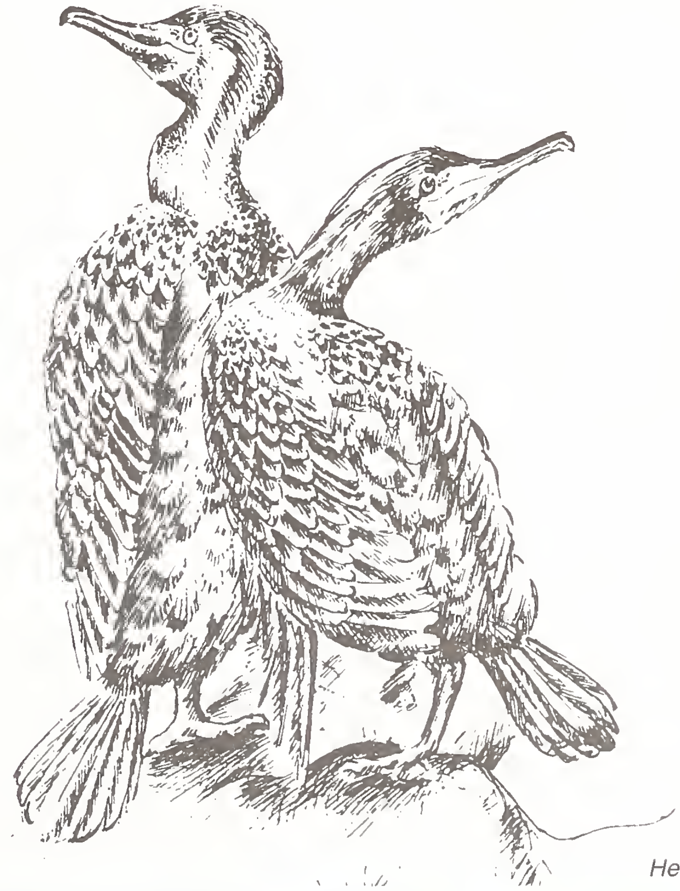
In the report, John Armstrong, Ross Gardiner (FFL) and Bob Laughton (Spey District Fishery Board) review recent studies and suggest that there may be little scope for Salmonid populations to compensate for losses of parr and smolts. John and colleagues set out to investigate experimentally one element of potential compensation in Salmon parr the recolonisation after severe population depletion. Their experiments, lasting 4 to 6 weeks, involved the removal of Salmon by electrofishing. Recolonisation averaged 21% (range 7 to 54%) by comparison with Salmon densities in undepleted areas nearby.

Where now?

At this point, it should be obvious to everyone that the question of whether bird predation affects fish population, and ultimately catches, has Tardis like qualities. On the outside, a simple enough question but inside, a mind boggling complexity requiring further information on the numbers of fish in the mainstems of rivers and compensatory mechanisms that may operate to deal with the effects of predation. The report suggests that large scale exclusion experiments could be a practical means of directly estimating the impact of sawbills on populations of Salmon parr in some rivers during summer. To this end, the authors recommend the interactive use of modelling and experiment as a powerful procedure for developing our understanding of fish population dynamics - the real heart of the fish eating birds/ fisheries debate.

Dave Carss and Mick Marquiss

Fish eating Birds and Salmonids in Scotland (ISBN 0 7480 7232 2) is published by the Scottish Office. To obtain a copy please contact Joy Dunn at ***Pentland House, 47 Robb's Loan, Edinburgh. EH14 1TY (tel 0131 244 6229) or consult the Scottish Office Web Site, www.scotland.gov.uk.*** *A copy is also in the SOC Waterston Library.*



Cormorants *Heidi Scott*

The Bass Rock and the Scottish Seabird Centre

If St Baldred, the 6th century recluse of the Bass Rock, could see the millennial version! The Bass Rock, a saint's retreat, military bastion, covenanters' prison, locus classicus for the noble Gannet and, through its lighthouse, eventual guardian of the Firth of Forth, is set fair to become the focus of Scotland's first Seabird Centre which, if all goes well, may even become the most technologically advanced in the world.

Changes

It is fewer than 50 years since I became enmeshed in the Bass Gannets and in that short span the changes on the Rock have been as monumental as those which occurred in the previous century and even in the 300 years before that. In a way, these 3 periods (50, 100 and 450 years ago) encapsulate much of the history of this plug of basalt, mate to its mainland companion, North Berwick Law, and a chain of others across the Lothian plain. The 16th century found the Bass, already an ancient stronghold, fortified with cannon, intensively cultivated in parts, its Gannets carefully exploited for food ("amongst our viands I must not forget the soleand goose, a most delicate fowl"), feathers (almost 300 Gannets were needed to stuff one feather bed!) and fat ("they make an excellent oyle called the gibanistick which is exceedingly good for healing anie sore"). By then this austere crag had already entranced naturalists, kings and historians. By 1850, the Rock, already nearly 150 years in the possession of the Dalrymples who still own it, had been long defortified (1701) and the centuries of exploitation of Gannets were drawing to a close. Demand for 'gugas' had declined well before the Wild Birds Protection Act. Then came the building of the lighthouse in 1903 and nearly a century's custodianship by Her Majesty's Commissioners of Northern Lights. Order reigned and the Rock was spick and span. The Gannets knew their place and this was largely on the cliffs. In the heyday of the Bass as a famous light, when the keepers cooked on a coal fired range, kept food in a limed hanging larder and lead lined storage bins, bathed in a galvanised tub and read by paraffin lamps, my wife and I had the rare privilege of living for 3 years in the ruined chapel half way up the Bass. Shortly afterward – I almost wrote "all hell broke loose" but what I should say is – the Rock entered the modern age, which may amount to the same thing. Television, refrigeration, formica and plastic, relief by helicopter and finally, automation of the light, arrived. When the keepers left in 1988 and as the Gannets continued to increase, the Rock soon reverted to a more natural state, a process which continues. Indeed the old Rock is rapidly being denuded of its turf and topsoil as the Gannets spread and this is cascading down the slope and piling up on the patch and in the courtyard.

The Bass Rock in 1986 *Bryan Nelson*

Increases

The Bass has long shared with one or 2 other Gannetries, notably St Kilda and the Canadian Great Bird of Bird Rocks in Magdalen Islands (at one time the largest of all Gannetries) the distinction of being the most famous in the world. It was the first to be mentioned in the literature (perhaps 6th century) and now could well be the largest single rock Gannetry. Grassholm may be pushing a bit, but Ailsa lies well astern. In my short time the Bass population has increased from 6-8,000 apparently occupied sites, which is nearly the same thing as pairs, in 1962, to 13,500 (1977), 21,600 (1985) and 30-40,000 (1994) which was the last count. This most recent estimate (already well out of date) has the inevitably large margin of possible error. The lower of the 2 figures excluded the large number of pre breeders, most of which should not be included in the category of 'apparently occupied sites' though it is difficult to disentangle them. Largely due to them, the count can vary by thousands within a few days. The dramatic spread has taken breeding birds from the top of the northwest cliffs to the very summit of the Rock. Spreading from the east side, they have blanketed the ground and would long ago have covered the concrete path and continued upwards to meet their fellows from the northwest but for human traffic. Gannets are also proceeding apace down the crags towards the chapel to join up with the group directly behind the lighthouse. This latter numbered 10 pairs in 1961 and is now well over 1,000 strong and besieging the entrance to the chapel. They confront the visitor a mere foot from the edge of the path. The east flats above the lighthouse, with no Gannets in the early 1960s, are now blanketed. Most of the gully headland, not long ago covered in turf and the Dalrymples' favourite picnic spot, has now been taken over, though many of them are still pre breeders. Even the low rocks by the inner landing, for long the preserve of Guillemots and Shags, are rapidly being colonised. The south slope below the battlements is still free but old records say it once held over 300 pairs and no doubt it will do so again. From North Berwick and Tantallon the Rock appears to be well nigh covered, apart from a wide and variable strip roughly bordering the path. Most of the Gannets between the top of the path and the summit cairn are not yet breeding. Many are 2 or 3 year olds, which come and go. Other are pre breeders establishing a definitive site in the season before breeding for the first time.

This steady increase has been largely fuelled by the output of the Bass itself rather than by the large scale immigration which has characterised some other Gannetries at certain stages of their growth. In turn, output has rested on consistently high breeding success, itself predicated on the reliable source of food which the Gannet's far foraging, deep diving and wide prey spectrum ensures. Bass Gannets have been remarkably free from the lean years suffered by some other Bass seabirds, such as Kittiwake and Shag.

Other seabirds

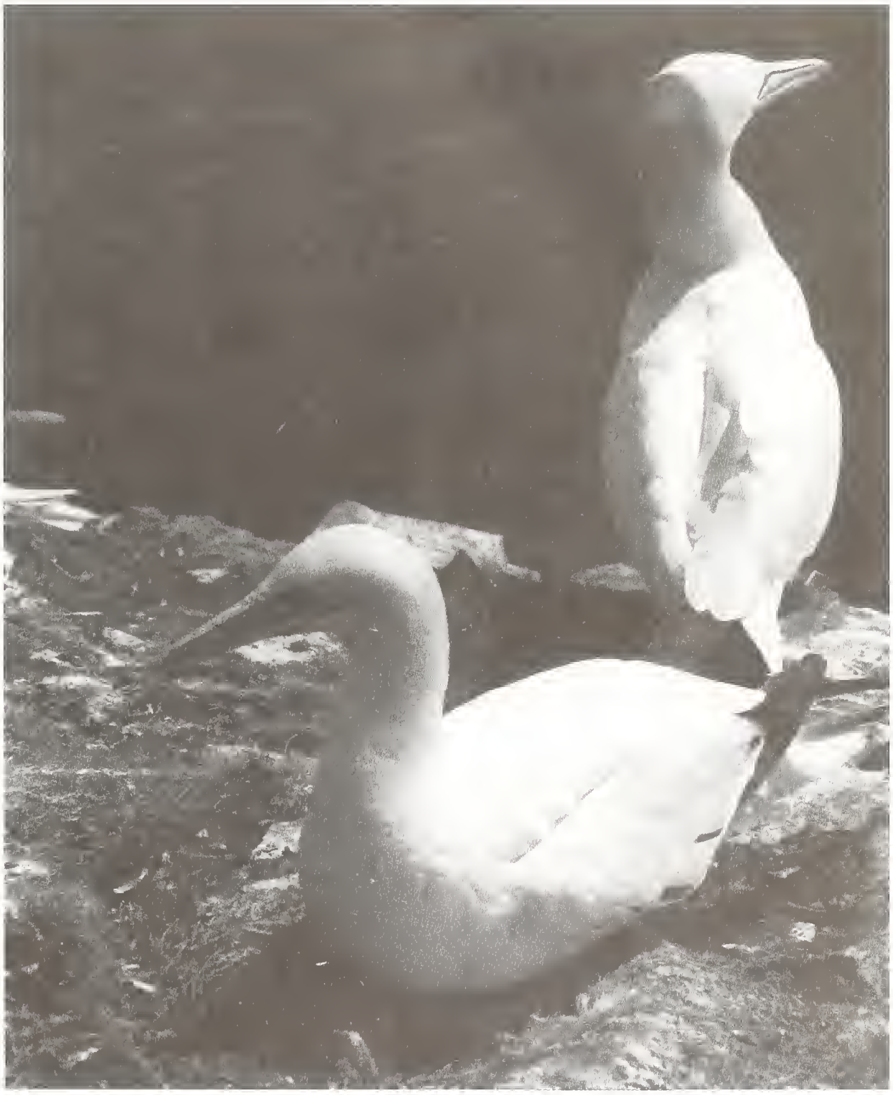
In addition to Gannets, the Bass is home to Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, Fulmars, Shags (no Cormorants), Kittiwakes, Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backs (and now a few unwelcome Great Black-backs which are snatching some Guillemot chicks) and Eiders. The fortunes of almost all these have changed over the years. Herring Gulls have declined markedly. They were displaced in hundreds from the north west slopes which are now covered by some 4,000 pairs of Gannets. They are increasingly being ousted from the summit area and the south facing escarpment above the chapel. The area in and around the garrison garden has remained a stronghold and it will be interesting to see if the Gannets can tolerate this sheltered hollow, which will be difficult for take off. The garden area is the main stronghold of the Lesser Black-backed Gull. The Greaters (3 pairs) are by the garden, near to the chapel and near the inner landing. Kittiwakes are markedly down on their previous high. For many years they have produced fewer young than normal – in some years hardly any. It is difficult to know how the Puffins are faring. There have never been many in the battlements, their only present nesting area, and one rarely sees more than 10 or 15 at a time. Guillemots seem to be holding their own in the east caves and have recently increased at the base of the east cliffs. However ,Gannets are encroaching on the inner landing area which was a Guillemot stronghold. Razorbills are mainly on the cliffs of Cable Gully and around the inner landing but have never been abundant. Shags are hugely down on their previous highs – absent from the base of the east cliffs, where once there were scores and many fewer on the inner landing stack. Fulmars have increased slowly over the years but probably still number no more than 50 or 60 pairs, although it is becoming more difficult to view their main area which is the east side of the gully. One to 3 pairs of Eider breed every year and Mallard occasionally.

There are few other species; Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Starling, Hedge Sparrow and Feral Pigeon regularly breed. As on the Isle of May, landfalls of autumn migrants may be massive and often include rarities.

Live pictures

The Bass, Fidra and other bird islands lie but a gull's glide from North Berwick. The idea of relaying live seabird pictures from these haunts back to a Seabird Centre in North Berwick came originally from a local man, Bill Gardner, who had designed the computer graphic systems for the BBC's weather forecasts. It chimed with the times and was eventually conceived as a Millennium Project (the original application was Gardner's). The Millennium Commission's agreement to part fund the project to the tune of £1,000,000 left a shortfall of around £2,000,000, most of which has been raised. The project (a charity) is directed by a Board chaired by Rear Admiral Neil Rankin and comprising Hew Dalrymple (heir to the Bass), Bill Gardner, David Minns of the RSPB, Sandy Grant Gordon, Susan Watson representing LEEL, Peter Collins of East Lothian Council and me as the seabird man. Tom Brock, an Aberdeen zoology graduate, has recently been appointed as the first Director of the Centre. Both LEEL and ELCL are generous supporters of the Centre and substantial help has been received from Haulwaste Ltd and the Bank of Scotland.

Scottish Natural Heritage are represented on the design and development sub committee and are contributing funds and suggestions. The Seabird Centre building, now under construction, looks out to the Bass Rock from Anchor Green. It has been



Gannets *Bryan Nelson*

imaginatively designed by local architects to suggest a somewhat truncated Gannet's head. Its stone, copper and bronze exterior will, it is hoped, resist the worst that a winter sea whipped up by a north easterly gale, can throw at it. The interior, on 2 levels, will be dominated by a large model of the Bass but the beating heart will be the high tech stuff. The visitor should be able to see and interact with live visual and documentary material at different levels of complexity. The live material will come from a link to video cameras on the Bass Rock and the RSPB island of Fidra. The challenge is considerable, given the lack of power on the islands and the inhospitable conditions but the rewards and potential of live, unedited material are immense.

The aim is to attract the widest possible range of visitors and to bring them back time and again to explore in more depth. To interest a 5 or 6 year old and an advanced university student of biology is no mean task, but that is our aim, for there is huge educational potential here. That is why we must provide indepth material. To this end there will be more than just the live cameras and stunning portraits. For example, visitors will want to know where seabirds breed in Scotland, how they conduct their lives, how they find a mate and rear their young, what their problems are and how man affects them. If the Scottish Seabird Centre is to live up to its name, they should be able to ask these and other questions about any seabird breeding in Scotland, including those such as shearwaters, petrels and skuas which do not breed in the Forth area, thought they occur on passage. This will require a wide and growing data base.

The visual displays will be wide ranging and imaginative and, where possible 'hands on'. The small theatre will screen films and slides. More peripherally but still important will be the shop and restaurant. The latter should provide a uniquely attractive venue. In winter, when the Bass and other islands lie dormant, there will be the shore birds and inshore sea ducks to excite interest. It may be possible to use the live cameras here, too, for it is hoped that the Centre will be a year round attraction.

In this innovative manner the aesthetic attractions and educational potential of these seabirds islands, so near to the Scottish capital, yet still wild and unspoilt, will be harnessed for the good of seabirds themselves. The more people understand the more they will care.

Bryan Nelson

Red Kites in central Scotland

For the first time in over 120 years Red Kites have successfully bred in central Scotland. In 1998 2 pairs successfully raised 5 young.

Up to 1998, 57 young Red Kites have been released in central Scotland and it is hoped to release a further 40 birds in the area before the end of this phase of the release programme in 2000. The survival rate for first year birds from the central Scotland release scheme compares favourably to that of the north Scotland scheme. It is believed that the majority of kite mortality occurs during dispersal from the natal site, however, as the population increases, it is noted that fewer kites disperse during their first winter, but it is a possibility that as the population increases further in the coming years that young birds may be forced to move in search of food due to the increased competition from older birds in the core area.

It has unfortunately been confirmed that poisoning is the biggest single threat to Red Kites in the UK as a whole. Five birds from the central Scotland release have been recorded dead since 1996, 2 of which were confirmed poisoning, one suspected poisoning and 2 others from unknown causes. The RSPB would like to stress that the majority of gamekeepers and farmers within the release site areas have been extremely cooperative as the survival figures demonstrate. It is suspected that most kite poisonings occur on estates away from the breeding areas, where staff are not familiar with the birds and may be trying to poison Foxes, Crows and other birds of prey illegally.

From mid October up to 31 birds attended a roost on occasions, 15 of them having just been released in July and August. Four wild bred young, 2 of which are from the north of Scotland, are also seen to frequent this roost on a regular basis.

The RSPB relies heavily on members of the public to report sightings of Red Kites so if you do see one please get in touch with the nearest RSPB office.

Bass Rock in 1996 *Bryan Nelson*

Tay Estuary

A planning application to extend the Riverside landfill site on the Tay Estuary at Dundee was deferred for 6 months by Dundee City Councils' Environment and Consumer Protection Committee. The development would have been on a proposed Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Birds Directive. The Riverside area, which is within the SPA, often holds several hundred birds whose numbers are of national or international importance in the Tay/Eden estuary areas. This site is also a major high tide roost for many species of waders including Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin and Redshank. The local Tayside conservation officer for the RSPB was more than pleased that this plan had been set aside for the next 6 months. Up to 25% of the UK's estuarine habitats have already been destroyed and cannot afford to lose this valuable habitat which is in international terms one of the most important bird habitats in the UK.

Redshanks and Knot *Arthur Gilpin*

Scotland's wetlands

Wetlands across Scotland are still under threat despite many having special designations. At the People and Wetlands - The Vital Link Conference in Costa Rica calls were made to the UK Government to impose its record on wetland protection. Since the first UK Ramsar sites were identified in 1976 another 40 sites have been designated in Scotland alone. A spokesman for the RSPB commented that Ramsar sites are the very best wetland areas we have but protection by name alone is not enough. We must ensure these sites are granted levels of protection that they deserve and that they are managed correctly. Our estuaries, lochs and peatlands continue to suffer a range of threats from unregulated hand raking of cockles in the Solway firth to landfill and mining operations on the Tay and Forth estuaries.

The Ythan estuary has experienced problems for many years from artificial enrichment from fertiliser run off. Some peatland habitats are now receiving proper management and positive mearsures are being taken in Caithness and Sutherland with the establishment of the Peatland Management Scheme which offers to pay those who have agreed to manage their land in an environmentally friendly manner. A number of designated Scottish Ramsar sites are at risk affecting mainly wading birds but in the case of the Lewis peatlands Red-throated Divers are also at risk through muirburn and overgrazing.

Birds in a Border garden

Norman Elkins article in *SBN* 54 was, as one would expect from him, extremely interesting. It also made me think that I don't keep enough records!!

Like Norman I have been recording for various BTO surveys the birds in my garden. My 'patch' is much smaller than his being only 150 square metres and, though I also started doing these surveys in 1987, I moved from Kent to the Borders in 1990. In Kent I lived in the middle of a town of 35,000, but in a small oasis with a tennis court's worth of woodland and stream between the houses, where Snipe were not uncommon if the weather was cold, for the spring in the garden did not freeze till well below zero. Chiffchaffs were regular, arriving mid March, while I have still to hear one from my Borders garden. Blackcap nested and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were as regular as their bigger cousins. They tried to nest in a dead fruit tree 10 metres from the back door; unfortunately it was next door and a garage was to be built. I dug a hole for it in my garden (2 yards away) and arranged with the workmen to shift it into the hole, but that night when I returned from work I discovered they had burnt it! The birds never came to the hanging nuts, but the bird I miss here - the Nuthatch - was regular; sometimes a pair would come together.

When I am short of Siskins up here during the winter, I think of them down in Kent visiting the feeders there, for there they were only winter visitors and would leave at the end of February or the beginning of March. Their cousins the Lesser Redpolls were with us throughout the year though I never found a nest on our land. Especially during snow they would come to the Alder catkins, but never to the table. Up here I have only recorded 2 and one was on the bird table.

One of the biggest differences are the Chaffinches. In Kent there never seemed to be more than a pair. They stayed in the wood and only very occasionally came to food put out and then only on the ground, as the Dunnocks did. Here in the Borders I have a flock; during the winter it sometimes reaches over 100 feeding in the garden. Greenfinches appeared in both gardens - in small parties in Kent: but in greater numbers up here.

One of the joys up here is the Willow Warbler. In spring they rarely come into the garden. But come the third week of July till the second week of August and there will hardly be a day without a visit, sometimes 2 or 3. They are nearly always young birds, obviously attracted by the other birds in the garden and are often very tame taking insects off the *Sedum spectabile* just a yard from the patio windows, so their 'yellow wellies' are very visible.

The garden here is surrounded by farmland, mainly grazing fields with small woods quite close. The sound of Oystercatchers and Curlews in spring gives a very different flavour to Kent. Fieldfares and Redwings tend to pass through, while in Kent the latter liked the Holly berries. Single Whinchat, Wheatear and Whitethroat have visited, plus 2 years ago I filmed Turtle Dove in the garden. Meadow Pipits often pause on their way to the hills in spring or when driven down again by snow. Goldfinches are newcomers to the nuts and have obviously learnt the ropes elsewhere.

Predators were few in Kent; Grey Squirrels Magpies and Jays. In the Borders we generally have a regular Sparrowhawk, though usually only during the winter. He or she is generally an immature bird. However, Goshawk has nested not far away, but is seldom seen more than 2 or 3 times a year, thought it has been into the garden - when the camera was out of action!

This year's joy has been the Great Spotted Woodpecker. We have had up to 3 birds in the garden at once; the male has been regularly feeding a chick and is seldom worried by us inside the house 10 feet away. I have not been able to prove it, but I believe there is in fact more than one family. Two males were seen, but not 2 females at once, and only one young in the garden. There has been much chasing but recently both male and female have hardly been away from the nuts all day. The young must be grossly over weight!

Michael Bickmore

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Bobby Smith*

Scottish Parliamentary Briefings

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, the liaison body for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations publishes Parliamentary Briefings. The current volume for 1999 is No2, issues in March and April covered the proposed arrangements for the working of the Parliament. Issue 5 records the announcement of the legislative programme, which will include bills on land reform, feudal tenure and National Parks.

The Briefings record the membership of committees, including the assignment of Robin Harper, Green Party to the Environment and Transport Committee. Other committees established include one for Rural Affairs. Access to MSPs can be arranged through the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. If you would like the Parliament HQ Reference Library to contain information about your environmental NGO or hold information on issues relevant to the Scottish Parliament then send it in. The old Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department has changed its name to the Rural Affairs Department. A Ministerial Committee reporting to the Cabinet has been established to help integrate rural issues with other policy areas and further the economic, environmental and social development of rural Scotland. Ross Finnie, MSP, has been appointed as the Minister for Rural Affairs responsible for policy development in agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Sarah Boyack is the new Minister of Transport (and co-author with Dr Jeremy Raemaekers of a Link Report *Scottish Environment Audits No 3, Planning & sustainable development*).

For further information about the activities of **Scottish Environment Link contact; Link at 2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth, PH2 8DB Tel: 01738 630804**

Barbets, Bulbuls and Brahminy Kites Ayrshire SOC in Sri Lanka

It's fun going to places that your local doctor can't locate on the map. For the benefit of anyone else who might try to inoculate you against Yellow Fever and Paraguayan Influenza, Sri Lanka is off the south east Coast of India. The trip was an introduction to Sri Lanka, with an emphasis on birds. The itinerary was planned to include each of the different Sri Lanka habitats, dry or wet, low or high. Locations visited were based on birding lore, gleaned from the Oriental Bird Club Sri Lanka supplement and from personal experience. The bird names used follow Kotagama and Fernando's *Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*. The 17 participants represented a broad spectrum of age and experience and the balance of birds, tea factories, spice gardens, temples and curries was very successful.

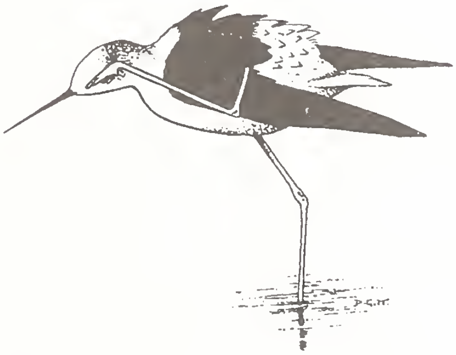
Our guide for the fortnight, George Samaratunga, greeted us in Colombo. Our first stop was at Kurunegala where we heard Asian Koel calling. As we sipped a cool drink by the tank (Sri Lankan for reservoir), we watched Indian Pond Herons and Whiskered Terns in good numbers. On our journey to Dambulla we saw White-throated Kingfisher and Cattle Egret. Both of these species were almost everywhere.

We stayed at the Kandalama Hotel, about 8 km east of Dambulla, on the edge of a large tank and surrounded by scrub jungle. The dawn chorus was truly magnificent with the barbets ringing chimes and the melodious calls of the Black-hooded Oriole echoing from the jungle, not to mention the screams of the Toque Monkeys. The views from the hotel were stunning, with the great mass of the Sigirya Rock Fortress in the distance. The hotel has now been covered in creepers and hidden by trees. Geoffrey Bawa, a famous Sri Lankan architect, created the structure to merge with nature and enable visitors to encounter birds and wildlife at close quarters. Black-crested and White-browed Bulbuls were soon ticked off.

The 4 nights at the Kandalama Hotel passed quickly before we moved to the ancient capital of the hill country, Kandy. We made a late afternoon visit to the oldest nature reserve on the island, the Udawattakele Sanctuary. Access to this remnant, secondary rainforest is from a city street and this ancient 'park' contains some of the oldest and tallest trees in Sri Lanka. Bird life was abundant although difficult to see high in the canopy.

Peradeniya Royal Botanic Gardens near Kandy are a paradise of exotic plants and trees and home for a colony of Fruit Bats. Thousands soar and swoop above the trees. On the hill road to Nuwara Eliya there are many tea estates with exotic names such as Sanquhar, Edinburgh or Melfort. Lunch at the nearby Ramboda Falls Hotel was interrupted when a magnificent Black Eagle appeared. We drove slowly and carefully over the Ramboda Pass, reaching 2000 m, where the air became noticeably cooler and fields contained recognisable crops of swedes and potatoes, runner beans and cauliflower. We were in the excolonial homelands, where Government officials and their families had imported Aberdeenshire granite for their baronial mansions. Our destination that night was the Tea Factory Hotel, near Kandapola, complete with the Goatfell Bar.

We later moved down to the plains and the dry zone at Wellawaya. There, the hotel is situated next to a lagoon with breeding Black-winged Stilts. We travelled by jeep to the Bundala National Park. This is a 'must visit' location of extensive, dense coastal scrub surrounding lagoons and salt pans. The Peacocks there were truly wild birds. An afternoon was spent at Tissamharama and Wirawila Tissa Bird Sanctuary, an area of woods and reed beds. Little and Indian Cormorant colonies were abundant



Black-winged Stilt *David Mitchell*

On another afternoon we drove to the Yala-Ruhunu National Park. This vast area, on the eastern side of the island, is open, dry scrub, interspersed with wooded lagoons and impressive rock formations.

Leaving Hambantota we travelled to the Uda Walawe National Park. The Park is lush grassland interspersed with Teak trees. Uda Walawe is renowned for raptors. Brahminy Kite were seen clearly.

The best birding in the Sinharaja Rainforest was from the access roads. Those who lingered longest got the best views. Our route took us along the A8 via Ingiriya to Horana towards Moratuwa and the urban reserve of Bellanawila Attidiya Sanctuary. These wetlands lie to the south east of Colombo and very close to Mount Lavinia. Our last full day in Sri Lanka was spent in the Muthurajawela Marshes.

There were no mishaps and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the birding and cultural experience.

Access to several of Sri Lanka's National Parks and Bird Sanctuaries is by hired jeeps accompanied by trackers who are not compulsory but hard to refuse. Most jeeps were open topped, but occasional closed vehicles were very frustrating and restraining. Trackers can be useful or useless. Few have binoculars, but they are accurate on their calls. Weather conditions were hot and sticky, although not too unpleasant. The Hill Country is always a little cooler and less humid.

Our final checklist for the fortnight 24/3 - 7/4/99 stood at a healthy 210 species.

Tony and Gerda Scott assisted by Keith Martin and Jim Thomson

Keith Martin has produced a full report with all bird species seen in Sri Lanka. The complete list of sightings is on the Internet at Urs Geisers trip report site: http://www.xnet.comlugeiser/Birds/TripReports/TripReports.html

Future Tours:

Tony and Gerda Scott, 4 Hilltop Place, Ayr, KA7 3PB (Tel &Fax 01292 281085 Email: in.touch@zetnet.co.uk are organising a trip to Cyprus in 9 - 16 October, 1999 (Leader: Angus Hogg). There are still places available. They also intend to organise a second bird watching tour to Sri Lanka and will be pleased to receive registrations of interest.

REVIEWS

Collins Bird Guide by K Mullarney, Lars Svensson, D Zetterstrôm and P J Grant. Harper Collins 1999. 392pp.
ISBN 0-00-219728-6., £24.99.

Here we have an authoritatively written and illustrated guide which has to be the new leader in its field full of detailed information backed up by an excellent range of pictures covering virtually every plumage and feature of each species. Though the pictures of the larger birds are on the small side, as is the print, the illustrations become larger as the birds get smaller so bringing out the necessary detail. The book is on the heavy side, probably unavoidable with the amount of coverage, and no doubt a soft cover version will follow. Though many of us may have a surplus of guides this one becomes a necessary addition and a landmark that will be very difficult to better.

Keith Macgregor

Birds of the Wetlands by James Hancock. Academic Press, *London*. 1999. 176pp. ISBN 0-12-322727-5. £24.95.

This book offers a personal account of places that the author has visited. It was originally published in 1985, but has been substantially enlarged with some new chapters and a whole new set of photographs. Chapters cover key wetland sites in the Americas, Africa, India (3 sites), China, Japan, Indonesia, Australia, Spain and Iceland.

One of the main attractions of the book, has to be the photographs, all taken by the author and they are a joy to look through. My only disappointment was the photograph of Little Ringed Plover shown in the Japan chapter - this is not the species we know here, so it may be a case of confusing different English names used in other countries. I hope this is the only one to be so affected.

Mark Holling

Population Limitation in Birds by Ian Newton. Academic Press. 1998. 597pp
ISBN 0-12-517366-0 Hardback £49.95. Paperback £29.95.

This book will be of tremendous interest and value to students, their lecturers, and field ornithologists, both amateur and professional, as a major source of information on bird populations, intelligently catalogued and clearly interpreted by one of the world's foremost ornithologists.

The book's 15 chapters are presented in 4 sections. First, a preview on bird numbers, how they are counted, their population trends and an introduction to the factors affecting them. Second a series of chapters on how bird behaviour can limit populations, with chapters on social systems and status, habitat and density regulation, territorial behaviour, density dependence and the effects of habitat fragmentation.. The third section deals with 'natural limiting factors', such as food supply, nest sites, predators, parasites and weather, concluding with a chapter on the interactions between different limiting factors, reminding us all how easy it is to consider factors affecting birds in isolation rather than in combination. Throughout, Newton uses key papers to illustrate his points, making excellent use of new work such as that by Gill *et al* on Pink-footed Geese feeding and disturbance, or Gosler on the fascinating relationships between the body weight of tits and the presence or absence of Sparrowhawks in Wytham Woods. Another invaluable feature is Newton's ability to summarise a range of studies in a single comprehensive table, for example, a summary of studies on the effects of winter food provision on breeding densities of birds around the world, or of large scale pesticide mortalities.

The fourth section covers the effects of man on birds, hunting and pest control, pesticides and pollutants and finally, a chapter on extinctions, including some predictions. Newton concludes that: "The futures of many organisms are likely to depend increasingly on the numbers and activities of people, and unless action is taken to prevent it, extinction rates could increase greatly in the coming years."

Ian Bainbridge

Helm Identification Guides - Tracks and Signs of the birds of Britain and Europe by R Brown, J Ferguson, M Lawrence and D Lees. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, London. 1999. 232pp.
ISBN 0-7136-5208-X. £17.99.

This is the paperback version of the book first published in hardback in 1987, with no revision. I have found it pretty comprehensive for eg feathers of British birds, but it is not exhaustive. That said, it is a book that should find a place in many a collection and the paperback version gives the opportunity to obtain it at a more accessible price.

Oonagh McGarry

Modern Wildlife Painting by Nicholas Hammond. Pica Press. 1999. 240pp.
ISBN 1-873403-55-0. Hardback £35.

In this very readable book the history and development of modern wildlife painting has been explored and analysed in 8 chapters. Predictably the author has concentrated on bird art with a few notable exceptions. The illustrators of field guides even get their own chapter which is justifiable in this age of worldwide birding when an accurate picture is so essential for correct identification.

The book is beautifully illustrated with over 140 colour plates. I have to say that some of the plates chosen to represent a particular artist's style could have been improved upon, but this probably reflected what was available to the author at the time. I was pleased to see that our own club members were well represented with plates by Donald Watson, Keith Brockie and an impressive cover by John Busby.

David Clugston

Helm Identification Guides - Crows & Jays by S Madge and H Burn. Christopher Helm, A & C Black, *London*. 1999. 192pp. ISBN 0-7136-5207-1. £16.99.

This second paperback edition appears unchanged from the first except for half a page of additional information on the Mariana Crow and the Fan Tailed Raven.

John Law

Where to watch birds in North & East Spain by M Rebane. *Christopher Helm*. 1999. 295pp. ISBN 0-7136-4700-0. £14.99

This guide follows the now well known pattern set in the previous 22 publications in this series and covers a large area of Spain much of which has valuable and varied ornithological interest. Indeed we are told that in the area described thare are 40 different species of European conservation concern.

Site descriptions and maps of the most important areas are comprehensive with useful access, timing and species information. Especially handy are the regional maps numbering the sites, of which 177 are noted, this making it easy to plan a releant route in advance.

Spain as a country is ornithologically superb and this guide should be an essential purchase for anybody contemplating a visit. It will serve them well.

Keith Macgregor

Scottish Wildlife Trust, and the RSPB

SWT has announced the appointment of Steve Sankey as its new Chief Executive commencing in July, 1999. Mr Sankey was previously Head of Policy and Advisory for Scotland for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Fiona Newcombe has been appointed as Agricultural Policy Officer with RSPB Scotland, to work with Jeremy Roberts, and focus initially on the new all Scotland agri environment scheme, progress on Agenda 2000 and the promotion of outcomes from their cattle and conservation seminars.

Dead garden birds

Dr. Tom Pennycott, SAC Auchincruive, has been looking at the deaths of garden birds caused by the bacterium, E Coli. Further information about his investigations can be obtained from him on 01292 520318

Misidentification

We would like to apologise to M Owen for the caption to the picture on page 8 of the June issue of *SBN,* the bird was as some of you pointed out not a Snow Goose but an *albino* Barnacle Goose.

Chris Smout has given us an entertaining account of an event back around 1960 when at Fala Flow in the company of D I M Wallace and James Ferguson-Lees a strange white goose flew up with a flock of Pink-feet. He cried out 'a white goose' meaning to have said 'a Snow Goose'. 'Yes,' came the reply from James F-L 'an obvious *albino*' as it flapped its pure white wings without the diagnostic black tips.

Scottish Wildlife & Countryside Fair

The 1999 Scottish Wildlife & Countryside Fair will take place at the RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve nr Kinross over the weekend 4-5 September 1999. The SOC will as usual have a stand and we look forward to seeing you.

BOURC

Dr Tim Melling has been appointed Secretary to the BOU Records Committee. He will replace Ian Dawson who has retired after 11 years on the Committee the last 3 as its Secretary.

Tim gained his PhD studying the population genetics of the Large Heath Butterfly. He is currently a Conservation Officer with the RSPB's north west England office, and his modest claim to fame was coming second in the first radio series *Wildbrain.*

Eric Meek replaces Richard Porter on the Records Committee. Eric is the RSPB's Orkney Officer and has been involved in studies on breeding birds and migration. He is co author of the Orkney Bird Report, and has just completed 5 years service on the Scottish Birds Records Committee. His experience in ornithology at home and abroad will be invaluable to the committee.

Swifts *Bruce Forrester*

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:-
Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362

REQUESTS

Have you heard any Corncrakes?

The distinctive rasping *crek crek* of the Corncrake was once a familiar sound in many parts of Britain and with the help of the Corncrake Initiative may once again be a possibility. Last summer saw the fourth full census of Corncrakes in Britain, Between 1993 and 1997 Corncrake numbers in core areas of the western isles numbers increased from 446 pairs to 637 pairs. However, in 1998 the number of calling males in the core areas declined to 589 birds recorded. More work is required if the Corncrake is to have a secure future in Scotland so if you happen to hear a Corncrake and think it maybe from a new area please contact the **RSPB, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness. (Tel 01463 715000).**

Under the Corncrake Initiative crofters are eligible for payments if Corncrakes are present on their land.

Concern for Swifts

The aims of Concern for Swifts (Scotland) are
*to raise awareness of the need to retain Swift nest sites in our towns and cities,
* to achieve conservation of their nest sites through negotiation with local authorities, private sector house/building owners and conservation organisations.
* to produce a range of design details suitable for incorporatin into different styles of building - old and new.
In order to do this effectively, we need to know where there are Swift populations.

By the time you read this, the Swifts will by away for this year, but should still be fresh in your memories. So, if you know of a Swift colony or of a current survey, please let us know. If you know of a building which is being renovated or demolished and where Swifts nest, also if you know of anyone taking action to conserve the Swift populations please let us know.
**Concern for Swifts (Scotland), Clare Darlaston, 287 Onslow Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow G31 2QG.
Tel 0141 554 8262.**

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers
See *SBN 50*

Colour ringed Shags
See *SBN 50*

Reed Warblers in Scotland
See *SBN 54*

SOC NOTICES

With this issue

Enclosed with this issue are *Scottish Birds, the Index to Volume 19, the Scottish Bird Report,* winter meetings programme, winter excursions, Report of Council/ Accounts, Conference programme and booking form and the new Direct Debit form with letter attached.

I urge all members to pay their subscription by Direct Debit. It really makes a huge difference to the time spent at 21 Regent Terrace processing subscriptions.

Ian Darling, President

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1999 were:-

April - 1st £30 M Bickmore, Selkirk; 2nd £20 R Glen, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 N Henderson, Edinburgh.
May - 1st £50 S Jackson, Falmouth; 2nd £30 A Maciver, Falkirk; 3rd £20 D Jenkins, Aboyne, 4th £10 J Jacobs, Kirkcudbright.
June - 1st £30 W Paterson, Gullane; 2nd £20 D Maciver, Stornoway; 3rd £10 J Maxwell, Hamilton.

In the 200 Club's 10th year, which ended on 31 May, 45 members won prizes totalling £1220 (both figures a record) and the SOC benefited similarly. All who continue to support the 200 Club are very warmly thanked. Any SOC member, over 18, wishing to join now for the rest of the "year" can send me a cheque for £9, payable to "SOC 200 Club", which will be gratefully acknowledged by **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176).**

1999 Scottish Ringers' Conference

The 1999 conference will be hosted by the Tay Ringing Group and will be held at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar from 12-14 November 1999. For further details please send sae to **Shirley Millar, Edenvale Cottage, Lydox Cottages, Dairsie, Cupar, Fife KY15 4RN.**

Spring 2000 SOC/BTO Conference

The 3 south west Scotland branches are joining forces to organise the 2000 spring conference, which will be held on 11 March 2000. The venue will be announced shortly.

New recorder for Lothian

With effect from 1 January 2000 Ian Andrews will be stepping down as recorder for Lothian. Ian has been the recorder for 15 years, with a short break while working in Jordan. In that time he has written *The Birds of the Lothians* and *The Birds of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* as well as editing early editions of the *Lothian Bird Report* and *Birdwatching Sites in the Lothians.* Ian now wants to spend more time pursuing other interest, including writing, and feels that now is the right time to step down. He will continue to help with the bird report and with record assessment. The Lothian Branch is grateful for all the work Ian has put in over the last 15 years.

David Kelly will be stepping into the role of recorder and with start with the 1999 records. From 1 January 2000 all records should be sent to **David Kelly, 149 High Street, Prestonpans, East Lothian EH32 9AX. Tel 01875 810827. E mail dj kelly@lineone.net.**

Scottish Birds Records Committee

Election of new member

Since 1990 one member of SBRC has retired annually. Pete Gordon is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Dougie Dickson, who lives in Glenrothes, Fife. Dougie has been an active birder for over 20 years, seeing all but 2 species on the SBRC list and having made over 20 foreign trips to 6 continents in search of birds. He has been the local recorder for Fife since 1984.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31 October, being signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be SOC members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC Local Recorders will be eligible to vote.
Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC, 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.

Photographic competition

Entries for this year's competiton should be sent to **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh no later than 1 October 1999.** Subjects must be wild birds photographed in Scotland with the appropriate licences as required. They should be clearly marked with the photographers name, the species and locality. All entries will be returned as soon as possible after the conference.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report.* For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at:
21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Endowment Fund Grants

Summaries of reports from the 1998 grants will be published in due course.

The Research and Surveys Committee awarded grants for 1999 to Alistair Duncan and Raymond Duncan to continue their study of urban Oystercatchers in Aberdeen; to the Treshnish Auk Ringing Group for work on seabirds on the Treshnish Islands; to Geoff Sheppard, for Barn Owl studies in Dumfries and Galloway; to Andrew Ramsay, for Manx Shearwater studies on Rum and to Allan and Lyndesay Brown for Mute Swan studies in Fife and Lothian.

If you would like to apply for a grant for 2000 to assist with a particular study please ask for an application form from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.** All completed applications must be received by **31 October 1999.** Particular emphasis will be made to grants involving voluntary work associated with Seabird 2000.

Thanks

Once again may we thank the many volunteers who gave assistance in the office during Sylvias absence, and also to those who came in to pack and send out the June mailing. If you would like to assist with this task please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on 0131 556 6042 for details.

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Bird

THE SCOTTISH
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB
Scottish
Bird News

DECEMBER 1999 No. 56
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Ian Andrews,
Sylvia Laing and
Michael Osborne

Millennium Make Over

By the time you read this it is likely that some of the changes that are part of the ongoing review of the Club's future will be underway. Council has recently agreed a number of exciting ventures which it is envisaged will project the Club into the future and help attract a wider membership.

SMITHSONIAN
MAR 08 2000
LIBRARIES

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Brian Clasper*

The Club's headquarters

There were a number of useful contributions from the floor at the AGM in Newtonmore regarding the ongoing debate about our headquarters - its location and raison d'être. A move from 21 Regent Terrace has not been ruled out (far from it) and I would like to hear your views on this and related topics. For example, is there a site/location/property out there that would fulfil all the requirements of accessibility and functionality? I am also looking for your help. I would like to set up a register of members with specific areas of expertise that would be useful, particularly in terms of the property options under discussion. I would welcome your thoughts and/or offers of help. Write to me at our current headquarters or e-mail me at the e-mail address below or at **brian.downingdesign@talk21.com**.

The Club's logo

Keith Brockie's excellent Crested Tit emblem has successfully publicised the Club since 1985. Now is an opportune time for the club to follow recent trends in many other similar organisations and adopt a more stylised logo. The new logo is designed to have as much graphic impact at both the small and the large scale and will be used on all our promotional material from now on. Retaining the theme of a Crested Tit, Council has chosen the design opposite which will, when appropriate, be used in every aspect of the corporate image of the Club.

The Club's name

The debate which followed last year's AGM left Council in no doubt that the majority of club members were reluctant to drastically change the Club's name. However, the decision has been taken to encourage wider use of the abbreviation "the SOC" in preference to our full title. Both the logo and the name will be phased into all the Club's publications in due course.

The Club's web site

We are all becoming increasingly exposed to the concept of the World Wide Web (the Internet) and its uses, whether it be through the media, schools, work or simply personal curiosity. Certainly an increasing number of Club members (and prospective members) have access to the Internet and use it as a means to find information and to communicate. The advantages of the Club having a presence on the Internet are many and varied,but its principal benefit is to advertise the Club to a world wide audience of computer users and ultimately draw in new members. The web site was launched on 1 December and has the address **http://www.the-soc.org.uk.** It contains information about the Club, branches, local recorders and much, much more. A weekly summary of bird news provided by Birdline Scotland (see page 2) would also be available to members. Each issue of *SBN* will publish the passwords necessary to gain access to this part of the web site for the following 3 months (the current passwords are 'red' and 'kite'). The intention is to keep our web site exciting and up to date and worth a regular visit by both members and non members alike. To maintain its appeal the web site will have to evolve continually, and new ideas will be incorporated in due course. Additional input and ideas from members are particularly welcomed. These can be sent or e-mailed to HQ. For example, the web site is likely to be looked at by visitors planning to come to Scotland, and this is a sector not catered for at present (eg local sites, contacts and advice). There are links within the site to other environmental organisations. Why not have a look at the site, and tell others about it. New members can actually join via the site! I would take this opportunity to thank Ian Andrews for all his work with the web site and the new logo.

E-mail for HQ

In addition to mail, phone and fax, the Secretary can now be e-mailed on **mail@the-soc.org.uk.** The use of e-mail is both less expensive and more immediate. It is envisaged that each of the branches should have a contact e-mail address to allow for the distribution of information and the collection of members views, particularly with regard to the current issues under review at Council and Management Committee. The individual member with access to e-mail will be able to play a more active role in such discussions.

Link with Birdline Scotland

Birdline Scotland will be familiar to many members as a source of recent Scottish bird news. As of 1 December1999, Birdline Scotland and the SOC will be cooperating in many matters, particularly the dissemination of bird information and advertising. *BLS* will be providing summaries for *SBN* and our web site, and it is envisaged that the link will assure a more comprehensive recording of Scotland's birds. Members' sightings of less common as well as rare birds are welcomed for inclusion in the BLS messages and summaries, but the current system of sending records to the Local Recorders should continue unchanged.

Brian Downing
President

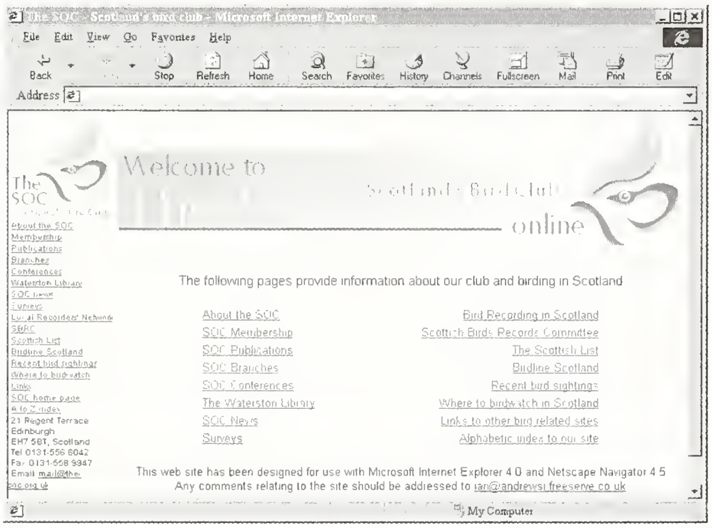
BIRDLINE SCOTLAND
In cooperation with the SOC
0891 700234*

Bringing you the latest news from Borders to Shetland

Please phone any news into the 24 hour hotline:
01292 611994
* This is a Premium Rate number

http://www.the-soc.org.uk

The SOC web site, launched on 1 December, contains information about the club and its activities under the following headings: about the SOC, membership, publications, branches, conferences, library, news, surveys, local recorders, SBRC, the Scottish List, Birdline Scotland, recent bird sightings, where to birdwatch (still under construction) and links to other sites. These, and many other pages are accessible from our home page (see left) or a comprehensive A-Z index. There is scope for considerable expansion and any suggestions or offers of articles, photos etc are welcomed. Please contact: **Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh EH21 6UW** or e-mail him at **ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk**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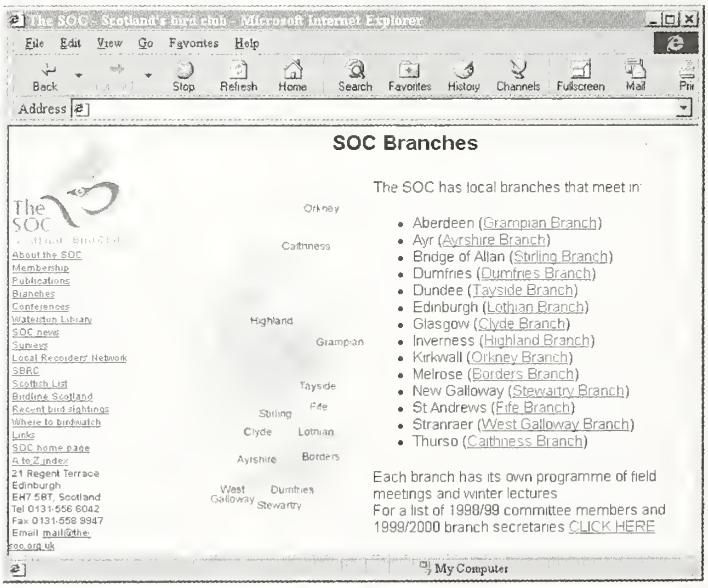
21 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh
EH7 5BT, Scotland
Tel 0131-556 6042
Fax 0131-558 9947
Email mail@the-soc.org.uk

The following pages provide information about our club and birding in Scotland

- About the SOC
- SOC Membership
- SOC Publications
- SOC Branches
- SOC Conferences
- The Waterston Library
- SOC News
- Surveys
- Bird Recording in Scotland
- Scottish Birds Records Committee
- The Scottish List
- Birdline Scotland
- Recent bird sightings
- Where to birdwatch in Scotland
- Links to other bird related sites
- Alphabetic index to our site

This web site has been designed for use with Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 and Netscape Navigator 4.5
Any comments relating to the site should be addressed to ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk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Highland
Grampian
Tayside
Fife
Stirling
Clyde
Lothian
Ayrshire
Borders
West Galloway
Dumfries
Stewartry
My Computer

SOC Branches

21 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh
EH7 5BT, Scotland
Tel 0131-556 6042
Fax 0131-558 9947
Email mail@the-soc.org.uk

The SOC has local branches that meet in:

- Aberdeen (Grampian Branch)
- Ayr (Ayrshire Branch)
- Bridge of Allan (Stirling Branch)
- Dumfries (Dumfries Branch)
- Dundee (Tayside Branch)
- Edinburgh (Lothian Branch)
- Glasgow (Clyde Branch)
- Inverness (Highland Branch)
- Kirkwall (Orkney Branch)
- Melrose (Borders Branch)
- New Galloway (Stewartry Branch)
- St Andrews (Fife Branch)
- Stranraer (West Galloway Branch)
- Thurso (Caithness Branch)

Each branch has its own programme of field meetings and winter lectures
For a list of 1998/99 committee members and 1999/2000 branch secretaries CLICK HERE

Waxwing *David Gowans*
To keep uptodate on the predicted Waxwing invasion, you can contact Birdline Scotland (see above right)

Persecution continues to affect Scotland's birds

Some of Scotland's rarest birds are still being persecuted in Scotland. A report from RSPB Scotland shows an increase in the shooting and destruction of birds of prey, including Golden Eagles, Hen Harriers, Red Kites and White-tailed Eagles. A total of 263 reports alleging offences against wild birds were received during 1998. Over half of these concerned the persecution of birds of prey. Confirmed poisoning incidents included 4 cases where Red Kites were illegally killed. The Hen Harrier is also being heavily persecuted on some grouse moors and is scarce or absent from large areas of suitable breeding habitat.

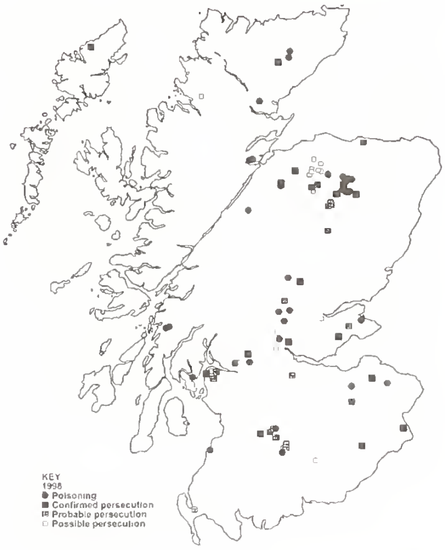
RSPB accepts that many landowners and their staff are doing their bit to help conserve wildlife. Unfortunately, a significant minority continue to ignore the law and persecute some of our most dramatic species. Much of this crime occurs in upland areas managed for game shooting. At a time when estates are looking for public sympathy, all of them should work with, not against, the public interest. Conservationists hope the Scottish Parliament will introduce tougher penalties to deter wildlife crime. Earlier this year, in a speech to formally open the new Osprey Centre at Loch Garten, Deputy First Minister, Jim Wallace, MSP, backed calls for custodial sentences for persistent offenders All wild bird crime incidents should be reported to local Wildlife Liaison Officers or to the RSPB.

Recent research by the Scottish Tourist Board has indicated that 40% of Western European visitors to Scotland identified wildlife as something that influenced their decision to visit. Until 10 years ago Red Kites were extinct in Scotland and returned as a result of a reintroduction programme carried out jointly by Scottish Natural Heritage and the RSPB. This year, some 30 pairs of kites attempted to breed. There are only 20 territorial pairs of White-tailed Eagles in Scotland: 6 pairs were successful this year, compared with none in 1998.

In the report, RSPB acknowledge the contribution of professional and amateur fieldworkers in the fight against wildlife crime, as well as those landowners who allow access to their estates to enable important wildlife survey work to continue. The Scottish Raptor Study Groups continue monitoring schemes which contribute so much to raptor conservation.

Peregrine *Ayrshire Bird Report*

Raptor persecution and poisoning during 1998



Poison incidents confirmed by analysis in 1998

Poison	Victim(s)	Bait(s)	Date	Location
A/chloralose	Red Kite		January	Black Isle
Carbofuran	Buzzard		February	Aberfeldy
Carbofuran	Buzzard		February	St Andrews
Carbofuran	Peregrine		February	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Buzzard	Rabbit	February	Tomatin
Carbofuran		5 Rabbits	February	Cabrach
A/chloralose	Red Kite		February	Black Isle
Carbofuran	Buzzard		March	Bonar Bridge
A/chloralose	Red Kite		March	Crieff
Carbofuran	Red Kite		March	Tomatin
Carbofuran	Buzzard		March	Tomatin
Carbofuran	6 Buzzards		March	Tomatin
Carbofuran	6 Foxes Dog		March	Gorebridge
Carbofuran	Buzzard		April	Comrie
Carbofuran	Hen Harrier		April	Glespin
Carbofuran	Buzzard	2 Rabbits Wood Pigeon	April	Cabrach
Carbofuran		Hare, Pigeon	April	Cabrach
Carbofuran		Hare	April	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Gt Black-backed Gull	2 Red Grouse Pigeon	April	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Buzzard Carrion Crow		April	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Dog		April	Turnalt
Carbofuran		Red Grouse Wood Pigeon	May	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Stoat	3 Red Grouse 3 Rabbits	May	Cabrach
Carbofuran		2 Wood Pigeons	May	Cabrach
Carbofuran	Golden Eagle		May	Garrogie
A/chloralose	Peregrine		May	Achentoul
Carbofuran		Red Grouse	May	Achentoul
Carbofuran	Golden Eagle	Hare	June	Turnalt
A/chloralose	Buzzard		September	Sanquhar
A/chloralose	Buzzard		October	Culzean
A/chloralose	3 Buzzards		November	Dunblane
A/chloralose	2 Buzzards	Rabbit	November	Ballindalloch
a/chloralose	Buzzard		November	Ballindalloch
Carbofuran	Buzzard	Grouse	November	Glen Almond

Source: SASA (analysis), Raptor Study Groups, SSPCA, Police, SERAD (then SOAEFD) & RSPB

Corncrakes may be exported

English Nature has applied to Scottish Natural Heritage, its sister body, for a licence to export 10 Corncrake chicks.

The bold rescue plan for the diminishing Corncrake population in England, where only 6 birds remain involves taking birds from Scotland to a breeder in Germany to eventually produce 100 chicks for England. Corncrakes are one of the country's most threatened species and are now confined to some Scottish Islands. Their demise has been attributed to intensive farming which has decimated their traditional nesting sites in fields of long grass.

Numbers have recently risen again after a Corncrake friendly farming initiative in the Hebrides and in Orkney, where harvesting is delayed.

The value of wild geese

Bird watchers and goose shooters spend an estimated total of £5.4 million per year in local economies around the main Scottish goose sites. In turn, this supports more than 100 full-time equivalent jobs. A new leaflet from RSPB Scotland and the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, *Geese and the Local Economy*, summarises a report produced for the Government's National Goose Forum.

On Islay, for example, expenditure by visitors coming to watch geese is estimated to add £269,000 - £346,000 to the local economy each winter. Other conservation related tourism spending increases this figure to close to £1 million. The estimate of damage done by geese to crops on Islay is £337,000 - £788,000 per year outside Special Sites, within which Government may offer farmers compensation. However, the tourism benefits that geese can bring are often not received by farmers.

These data show that compensating farmers for having large numbers of geese on their land can bring public benefits although there is a need for better mechanisms to link the income which geese can bring with those who carry the costs.

Lottery money to provide cowpats

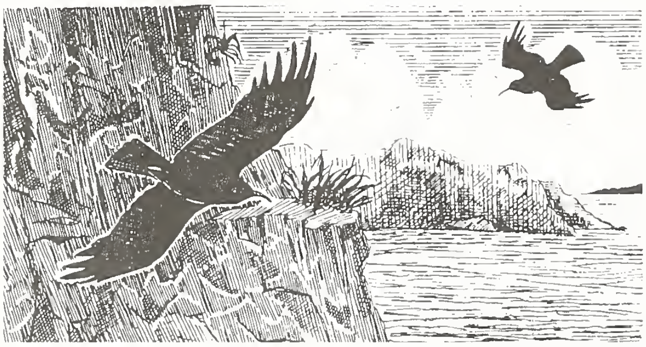
Lottery money is to be used to secure the future of the Chough after the population in Scotland fell to a perilously low 132 breeding birds. Choughs have declined markedly on Islay where in 1982 there were 61 pairs, compared with 49 today. Islay represents a stronghold for the bird because there are thought to be only 66 pairs in Scotland.

A programme on Islay aims to bring the Chough back from the edge by providing them with more cow pats. The decline in the species has been caused by the crisis in the farming industry in the last decade. The RSPB was awarded a grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund to buy a strip of coastline on the island which is important for Choughs.

Choughs feed mainly on invertebrates which they extract from cow pats, and in the last 12 years the population of Choughs has plummeted mainly due to changes in farming practices, which have meant fewer cows grazing in the area and, therefore, fewer cow pats.

When Upper Killeyan came on the market after its previous owner decided to leave the industry, it became apparent that no farmers were prepared to bid for the land. The RSPB moved quickly to acquire the property which it will stock with beasts from its farm at Gruinart as well as cattle belonging to a local farmer, George Ferguson, who has farmed in the area since 1991. A spokesman for the RSPB added 'Choughs natural home is on cliffs but they also associated with the roofs of old buildings. As part of the programme we will improving access for them to disused buildings. We will also be looking at the dune system because as well as eating insects from cow pats, they like the short grass which grows on the sand'.

Mike Peacock, the RSPB's Reserves Manager on Islay said "The decline has been worrying but we hope that this new reserve will help to restore this threatened bird species to its former numbers".



Choughs *Steven Brown*

Black Grouse

Black Grouse and Heather are included in the latest and final tranche of UK Biodiversity Action Plans. Michael Meacher, the Westminster Environment Minister, added 41 species and 21 natural habitats, taking the total numbers to 391 and 45 respectively, to the government's action plans for saving the country's most endangered species and habitats.

Of particular interest to Scotland is the plan to restore 3 million hectares of upland heath and moorland. Heather, is synonymous with Scotland, but has suffered greatly in recent decades due to over grazing, gains by forestry and the spread of Bracken. This loss has threatened the survival of a number of Scotland's upland wildlife species. The Black Grouse, Britains fastest declining bird, is also included in the latest plans. Numbers of Black Grouse in Britain – the vast majority of which are found in Scotland – have declined by 75% in the last 10 years. Dr Mark Avery, the RSPB Conservation Director, said 'This plan provides clear targets and objectives to help Black Grouse, but it will fail unless the governments agriculture departments address the problems of overgrazing. There are too many sheep in the uplands'. Scottish Natural Heritage has expressed confidence in the plans. However, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions said that Mr Meacher had announced no new money and that the budgets of English Nature and SNH already had provision for spending on biodiversity.

Carrifran Valley

The Peebles based Wildwood Group plan to buy and to restore Carrifran Valley in Dumfriesshire to the condition it was in 6000 years ago, and in the last 2 years have raised £1million towards the project.

Six thousand years ago Wolves, Boar and Wild Ox lived in the valley but now only sheep graze the slopes near Moffat where the group aims to recreate a woodland.

They want to go back to the time at the start of the Neolithic before man began to have an impact on the landscape. Thousands of native trees from the Carrifran area are now being grown in nurseries.

Philip Ashmole a retired University lecturer said 'what man and his grazing animals did to this valley and similar areas of Scotland over the centuries is almost as bad as what people are doing to the tropical rain forests now. Our feeling is that there should be a place in Scotland where people can bring their children in 100 years time to see what it would have been like if man had not intervened'.

Climate threat to mountains and wildlife

New research predicts alpine plants and bird species could be lost earlier than first thought. By 2050 alpine plants will have begun to die out and birds such as the Snow Bunting and Ptarmigan will be in retreat. Scottish Natural Heritage has said it will have to revise its climate change model for Scotland because of the new evidence. The predictions for accelerating global warming come from a recent study of the vegetation in Norway's mountains. The mountains of Norway are similar to the Cairngorms and a more accurate comparison, has uncovered notes on the distribution of upland plants on Norway's mountains compiled 60 years ago when the average annual temperature was about 1°C lower than today. By comparing them with plants found in the same locations now, Prof Birks has been able to provide the most accurate prediction yet of what is likely to happen in the next 50 to 100 years when temperatures are expected to rise by the same amount again. "We have found that the latitudinal ranges of many plants have migrated upwards by 200-300 metres in just 60 years. Willow scrub and Heather are extending upwards as the temperatures rise, but the alpine plants at the very tops of mountains have nowhere to go". The same situation applies in Scotland. Species such as Drooping Saxifrage, Tufted Saxifrage and Crowberry will soon disappear from Scottish mountains tops, he predicts.

Des Thompson, the principal uplands adviser for SNH, said several bird species already in decline will soon be on the brink of extinction. In 50 years he predicts breeding pairs of Ptarmigan will fall from 10,000 to 1,000 and Dotterel from 840 pairs to less than 50.

Raptors and homing pigeons

At the time of the Scottish Parliament elections, pigeon enthusiasts were encouraged to write to prospective MSPs seeking a change in the law to allow raptors that kill (or frighten?) homing pigeons, to be culled. I wrote to most of the Ayrshire candidates, on behalf of the Branch, to let them know that we don't agree with this view, and that a return to the persecution of raptors would be very unpopular. However, local MSP Phil Gallie has been persuaded by the pigeon lobby that increases in raptors numbers have caused the recent declines in populations of many songbirds. I am trying to convince him of the fallacy of this argument, but I don't know how many other MSPs are receiving similar pressure from the pigeon fraternity.

At the moment, the focus of attack seems to be Sparrowhawks, though any concession on these would almost certainly bring Peregrines into the firing line – probably literally. It is claimed that some hawks have taken to hanging around pigeon lofts and attacking, or scattering, the birds when they are let out. MSPs are also being told of the results of the Langholm studies on Hen Harriers and Red Grouse as evidence of the need to cull raptors. We are all going to have to be prepared to speak up on this matter. Pigeon owners are likely to paint the picture as black as possible and we have to try to put things back into perspective. It is easy but wrong to blame raptor attacks for every lost bird. It seems to me that the main arguments are:

- Interference with a few people's hobby is not a justification for trying to remove the top rung of the food chain;
- There must be ways of reducing pigeon losses without actually killing raptors;
- Any relaxation of protection of Sparrowhawks could lead to a general free for all against other rarer raptors.

Reductions in songbird populations are mainly the result of the spread of the human population and changes in agricultural practice, not the recovery of raptor populations. Song birds evolved over long periods of time to coexist with birds of prey.

This argument is going to rumble on for some time. We had better be ready for it.

Roger Hissett,
Conservation Officer, Ayr Branch

Charles
Frank

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Environmental payments

RSPB figures show that the UK is near the bottom of the league of national agri-environmental payments, a figure reached by dividing total environmental payments to farmers by the farmed land area, and Scotland is the lowest in the UK.

Austria, for example, gets 140 euros per hectare, Finland more than 100 euros, Ireland, Italy and Germany about 40 euros and the UK 8 euros. Within the UK, almost £70 million a year has been allocated to England, £22 million to Scotland and £16 million to Wales. There is also a ceiling on individual payments in Scotland. A farm or croft in the Western Isles meeting all the necessary agri-environmental scheme conditions could qualify for a maximum payment of £7,000 a year; a similar farm in the Lake District could be worth up to £34,000.

The RSPB Scottish Director, Stuart Housden, speaking at a press conference on Woodhead Farm, Midlothian, to introduce the RSPB's booklet *The Future of Livestock Farming in Scotland* said 'The Scottish Parliament has the chance to make a difference by giving more farmers the chance to take part, removing the ceiling and increasing the payments. Production based subsidies have encouraged farmers to drain wetlands and overgraze moorland, but still farming is in crisis. Farming and environmental interests must work together to influence the system of support for Scottish farming'. The aim must be to at least get level with Ireland where 48,000 of the 150,000 farmers benefited from the scheme. In Scotland, where there have been many disappointed applicants for the existing environmentally sensitive area and premium schemes, the participation rate is about 6,000 farmers out of an estimated 32,000.

North American waders in Scotland in autumn 1999, a record influx

Record numbers of North American waders were seen in Scotland this autumn with the influx centred around several fast moving Atlantic depressions in early September In total between 8 August and 31 October there were at least 65 individuals of 8 species recorded. The following is a brief summary of this influx.

Distribution of North American waders in autumn 1999. (largest dot = 9, smallest = 1).

The standout record is obviously the Juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher at Rosehearty, Aberdeenshire from 11-24 September, which was refound in Teesside on 29 September. The main event, though, was the remarkable influx of Semi-palmated Sandpipers with an adult reported on Stronsay on 12-13 August, at least 12 seen between the 4-23 September and at least 7 on the Outer Hebrides , 2+ on Islay and 2+ on Tiree also. A juvenile at Port Logan, Wigtownshire on the 18-23 September is the first record for the Scottish mainland . There had only been 4 accepted records for Scotland prior to this influx - the first of which was as recent as 1992 . There were also record numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers and American Golden Plovers seen with no fewer than 29 of the former and 10 of the latter reported, somewhat surprisingly only 2 Buff-breasted Sandpipers were reported, on Lewis and Islay in early September. Also on Islay there was a juvenile Baird's Sandpiper from 5-21 September with 3 others seen on the Outer Hebrides whilst the 3 White-rumped Sandpiper reports were all from there. Finally 2 Lesser Yellowlegs were seen at Tyninghame, Lothian, 26 September -10 October and Birsay, Orkney 26-27 October.

Angus Murray

Semi-palmated Sandpiper *Alex Barter*

Recent Reports August to October : a review of autumn 1999

The 2 potential British firsts seen in Scotland in autumn 1999 could not be more contrasting. One had been expected for a long time, the other was completely unexpected; one was seen by an estimated 1000 people, the other was seen by one observer on the remotest of all Scottish islands. The first one is, of course, the juvenile Short-billed Dowitcher which graced Rosehearty beach, Aberdeenshire from 11-24 September. The second is an Olive-tree Warbler, which was seen by the warden on St Kilda at the end of August. Whilst it would seem to be an unlikely vagrant this east Mediterranean species is the most distinctive *Hippolais* species. The bird on St Kilda was seen and described well and there are records from Germany and Sweden. Time will tell.

The other main rarity, on 9 August, was Scotland's first Royal Tern in East Lothian. Initially seen at Thorntonloch, the bird, an adult winter, was relocated at Musselburgh where it was present until dusk, though not at dawn on the 10 August, much to the chagrin of many. There were record numbers of Sandwich Terns, perhaps up to 5000, in the Musselburgh area at the time while on the Fife side, between 27 August and 3 September there were 6 days when over a 100 Black Terns were counted flying west past Kinghorn. With only small numbers seen elsewhere in Scotland it is hard to believe that a passage of birds was taking place, a sizeable feeding flock seems more likely. What can be said is that the previous Scottish record count for the species of 19 was certainly surpassed.

Isabelline Shrike *Frank Golding*

On the whole seawatchers commented on a poor season though there were good numbers of Pomarine Skuas, mostly juveniles, seen in October. The standout seabird record was the feeding group of 70 Great Shearwaters seen c10km north of Coll on 3 October. Amongst wildfowl a female Black Duck was at Loch Fleet from 26 October (the first record for Sutherland),an immature male Harlequin Duck was on Fair Isle on 15 October (the second record for the island), up to 18 Surf Scoters seen was a good showing and the central Scotland Taiga Bean Goose flock is at its highest ever level with 176 birds seen in October. Hobbies appear to be getting commoner in Scotland with 11 reports this autumn. Outwith the Nearctic invasion it was not a great autumn for the scarcer wader species, though c500 Curlew Sandpipers were reported, with a marked influx from 21 September onwards with record counts in both Ayrshire and Argyll. In what has been a fantastic year in Argyll 2 other potential county firsts were seen in September on Tiree a White-winged Black Tern and a Red-rumped Swallow. Fair Isle also managed to add a new species to its list this September but for those staying at the observatory at the time it was neither a hoped for nor expected species. The bird was a Kingfisher fishing the rock pools at the south lighthouse. Nearby, on North Ronaldsay during a purple patch in late September, an Aquatic Warbler on 21-22 September was the first record for Orkney.

Most observers commented on a comparatively poor August and September for passerine rarities and scarcities though in September on Shetland there was a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler on Foula on the 23rd, and on Fair Isle a Paddyfield Warbler was seen on the 22/23rd with 2 different Blyth's Reed Warblers present on 26-29 September. Scarcity numbers were generally down on recent Scottish autumn totals eg the 80 Barred Warblers and 65 Yellow-browed Warblers reported throughout the period were the lowest autumn totals in Scotland since 1993 and 1995 respectively. One scarcity which did show up well was Ortolan Bunting with c15 seen including 2 mainland records at Aberdeen and Angus in September. In contrast to last autumn only 2 Rustic Buntings and 2 Little Buntings were seen whilst the fact that a Myrtle Warbler and a Melodious Warbler managed to find themselves together in the same plantation at Grogarry on South Uist on 17 October sums up the magic of migration. The period of easterly winds from the 15-25 October resulted in good numbers of migrants, both common and rare, and will probably be the part of autumn 1999 which will linger longest in most memories.

The stars amongst the rarities seen in this period were the 2 Red-flanked Bluetails at Scatness, Shetland on 16-17th and St Abbs Head on 16-19 October. This was the start of a purple patch in the Borders with a Firecrest and 2 Pallas's Warblers at St Abbs (13 Pallas's were seen throughout Scotland in October) and at nearby Burnmouth an Isabelline Shrike was present from 24-31 October. Nine incredibly fortunate observers looking for the Shrike here on the 25th "jammed in" on a Pallid Swift flying up and down the dean here for an hour in the afternoon before it was unceremoniously taken by a Sparrowhawk leaving everyone present with a sense of incredulity. This amazing record is the second for Scotland after a late October Orkney record in 1996, though this autumn it was one of an unprecedented influx with at least another 12 reported from the east coast of England. Other rarities in the 15-25 October period included 3 Lanceolated Warblers, a Black-throated Thrush and a Radde's Warbler all on Shetland, a Dusky Warbler on Orkney (2 had also been seen in late September on Orkney and in Aberdeenshire), and a Lesser Grey Shrike in Fife. Four rare wheatears were also seen with a Desert reported on St Kilda on the 20th, probable female Eastern Black-eared on Orkney on 16th and 2 male Pied seen on Orkney and in Aberdeenshire. Also in this period there were good numbers of Blackcaps and eastern race Chiffchaffs seen as well as an influx of 'northern' Bullfinches and Great-spotted Woodpeckers into the northern isles with a few Greenland and Arctic Redpolls also seen. By the end of October Waxwings had been seen at several locations.

Angus Murray

In the first week of November highlights included a Greater Yellowlegs on the Outer Hebrides, and a male Harlequin Duck and a Lesser White-fronted Goose in Aberdeenshire.

Branch Newsletters

Several branches produce newsletters for local distribution, often at branch meetings. We receive copies at 21 Regent Terrace and these are placed in te Club Library. They are also scanned by the Editor for items to include in *SBN*. Some extracts accompany this article.

It is interesting to see how different branches approach the production of newsletters. Fife is now on No 72, a 4 page folded sheet with diary dates, local sightings, information from the Chairman and Secretary, accounts of outings and a scurrilous letters page which we have reproduced. Ayr publish *The Stonechat* and the latest edition runs to 12 pages, it has regular features such as a diary, and coverage of local conservation issues, see page 5, plus other less serious articles. *Highland Bird News*, carries the same sort of regular features as Fife and Ayr, though in a different format.

We are always happy to see copies of branch newsletters so please send them to Sylvia at 21 Regent Terrace. If anyone who produces a local newsletter would like to share their tips with members from other areas we will happily publish the information.

Editor

Extracts from Fife Branch

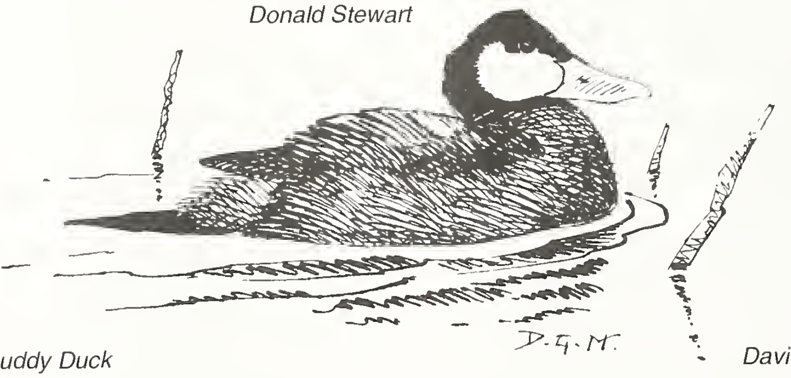
North Uist

Thirteen members of Fife Branch set off for North Uist on 28 May. We were a motley lot (apart from the 23% of us who were called Alison!): some of us had even been to the Uists before, others had not and were keen, desperate even, to see the crakin' critturs. The weather was not promising as we made our way from Fife and it was still raining when we assembled in Uig. The crossing was reasonably sheltered on the port side of the ferry and most people saw the commoner seabirds with a few Manx Shearwaters, Arctic Skuas, the odd Storm Petrel and Black Guillemot.

Saturday was drier but not much warmer as we set out on a circular tour of North Uist, including a trip over the new causeway to neighbouring Bernerary its fascinating ruins and conversions of old black houses. Most of the day was on North Uist itself with the RSPB reserve, at Balranald, the centrepiece. Breeding waders were everywhere, some other highlights included a Great Northern Diver in summer plumage, 3 Barnacle Geese, Little Tern, Short-eared Owl and Raven. And Corncrakes? We heard birds calling in several places, mainly at Balranald, but it wasn't until we were returning from a spot of sea watching there, that one showed itself. We first heard it calling from a small field adjoining the RSPB visitor centre and then Allister Todd mentioned casually that he had it in his telescope. A certain member of the group, anticipating the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition dived for the telescope, almost knocking it over in her excitement, but eventually she and everyone else had reasonable views of the bird's head at least!

The improvement in the weather continued on Sunday when it became positively hot, at least out of the wind. Back to Balranald where, after a brief fly past by a flock of 6 Whimbrels, we were treated to superb views of 3 Corncrakes. 'Our' bird was calling away when another 2 flew into his patch; some territorial disputes followed, during which all 3 could be seen running along a fence line. Even the most Corncrake deprived amongst us were happy! The return crossing was flat calm; several cetaceans were seen, the mountains of Skye were superb. All a very fitting end to successful weekend.

Donald Stewart



Ruddy Duck *David Mitchell*

Dear Sir or Madam,
I am concerned about the increasing irreverence in the Fife Branch SOC Newsletter. I fought for Queen and Country and expect certain standards to be maintained in the company I keep and the organisations to which I subscribe. In an attempt to prevent this decline, at the Branch AGM next April I propose putting forward a motion that all members should wear tweed jackets and either a kilt or moleskin trousers except the ladies (God bless 'em) who should wear the same if they desire, although a frock in either sailcloth or gabardine would be a perfectly acceptable alternative.

I am yours etc.
Brigadier Chris 'Chunky' Marmalade
Glen Auld Farg

Dear Sir,
Reference the Brigadier's formal togs plan: not a bad idea and certainly better than the proposal a few years ago by Stewart Nielson to set up a 'Birding in the Buff' chapter of Fife SOC. I understand that a combination of cold weather, gorse and stinging nettles left its mark. It is also rumoured that a certain barbed wire fence left an impression on some members who never got over it.
As we approach a new episode in Scotland's history it would surely be appropriate to revert to the kilt for bird watching and I understand that a formal approach has been made to the Plaid Finder Pursuivant, or whoever it is responsible for approving such things in the Scottish Parliament, for a Fife Twitching Tartan which can be worn by any Fife affiliated birdwatcher. The suggested design is most pleasing with red, blue and yellow lines, running with the weft and the weave, set on a field of green. However, close inspection shows that the lines are cleverly composed of tiny motifs strung together. Red is made up of telescope tripods erect, blue is made up of Ruddy Duck bills agape, and yellow is a montage of SOC committee members aghast.

Yours sincerely,
Edwina Goosefoot-Trefoil
Bo'ness

Dear Sir,
I wonder if your readers can help. I am undertaking research into human interaction within bird watching hides of Fife for a PhD as an external student of the University of Auchtermuchty. I am particularly interested in episodes of what I call 'hide rage'. A classic example is where people in the hide have to shuffle and jockey for position to see an interesting bird, but one person at the front refuses to adjust his position (it's always a male) to let others get a good view. I am told a clash of tripod legs is inevitable and can lead to exchanges of opinion about parentage etc.

The exact opposite, where the hide door is opened in an aggressive manner and the newcomer fails to be intimidated by the territorial claims of the occupants, can also lead to confrontation. Other causes of hide rage are thought to include opening a window on the wrong side and talking loudly while approaching the hide and then continuing the chatter inside. However, the highest levels of rage are thought to be induced by the uncommunicative lone birder who gets up to leave the hide at midday and then calmly writes in the logbook that an amazing rarity had been visible from 0900 to 1145. It is rumoured that such behaviour has resulted in threats of punishment beatings by the Provisional RSPB. Please send details of incidents of hide rage to me so that we can begin to get a true picture of birding in Fife.

Yours ever
'Bluter' McPhadden
Barlinne

Extracts from Highland Branch

After the AGM (April, 1999)

A day of socialising – and pouring rain – and on to Arrochar, another brilliant Forestry Commission site on Loch Long, with Eiders all around. The 21st was a day of continuous heavy rain, stair rods, but we found a wonderful seafood shop near Strachan and an Iceland Gull at Inveraray. Otter Ferry appeared a lovely area, but best explored in dry weather.

It was still raining the next morning. Enough was enough and we headed back east to find Perth dry! Change of plan; continue North East to the Ythan. A long drive, but brilliant when we got there. Loads of waders and the King Eider! Thousands of Pink-footed Geese and one Barnacle, but what damage were they inflicting on the crops?

David Galloway

Birding on the Stoerhead Peninsula

Nothing seemed to be happening apart from a party of young Shags splashing in the sea below. Then Gannets began to arrive. By this time I had been joined by a very knowledgeable friend who had come across from the East Coast in the hope of seeing Minke Whales. We were lucky and from then on I had the use of his scope. Yes, a Minke Whale kept surfacing and blowing. This attracted a huge raft of Gannets, all hopeful of catching the fish the whale had scared off.

Betty Mathieson

The Evening Chorus

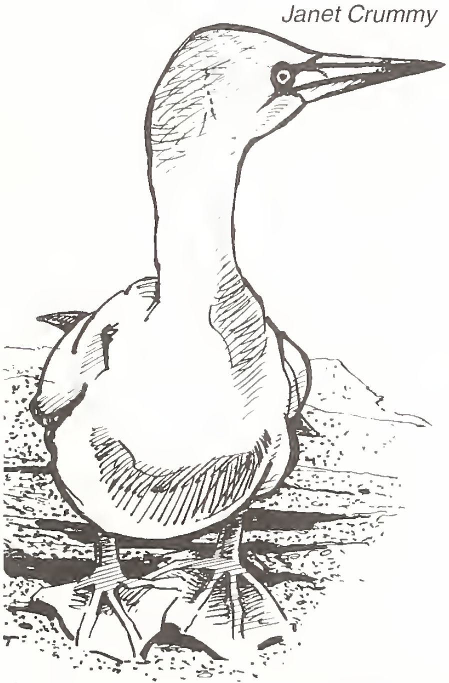
We drove through town making for Essich which signifies a 'water fall' or 'rapidly falling stream'. Just before Allt Morthere is a lochan, colonised by Black-headed Gulls. Meadow Pipits, said to be our most common breeding passerines, were much in evidence,a Short-eared Owl was spotted alighting on a fence. Almost immediately we were fortunate to hear the undulating bubble of Black Grouse. We detected the lek and counted 8 males all of whom were anxiously eager to out perform the others in their jostling priapic tryst in order to impress females.

Donald Mackay

The Weekend to Eigg that wasn't

The wind was picking up and ripping off young Oak shoots so that the road was green. We parked at the lighthouseat Ardnamurchan Point and hid in the coffee shop until the worst of the weather passed; thunder rumbled and hail sped horizontally passed the window. We braved the elements and walked to the far side of the lighthouse, beside the foghorn. The sea was crashing on to the rocks with spray flying high in the air. Despite this, we had a good variety of seabirds. We could see another shower approaching, so left our wee bit of shelter and ran back to the cars. Some members then headed for home, while others had an enjoyable weekend albeit not on Eigg.

Janet Crummy



Gannet *David Mitchell*

Extract from Ayr Branch

Definition of Twitcher

Bird droppings on your car windscreen do not make you unhappy because you have to clean them off, but because you recognise them as the work of a Daurian Jackdaw, and you haven't got it on your life list.

Someone yells "Duck!" and you look up and shout "Where?".

Your spouse says "It's either me or the birds" and you have to think about it.

Your children have not had new shoes in two years, but you own a Swarovski.

Anon – Ayrshire SOC Member

Landing on Ailsa Craig

Sitting in Jim's car, on my way to Girvan, for my fourth attempt at ticking Ailsa Craig, I couldn't help but think back to my previous attempts.

My first try was probably the most memorable. I had travelled down to Girvan full of hope only to be told on the quayside "We're not going". The weather was against us. What a disappointment. However, we quickly decided we would go to the Wood of Cree instead. Driving out of Girvan, thinking 'Well, at least it won't be a wasted day', my clutch cable snapped. So instead of Wood of Cree it was RAC.

My second attempt was not so dramatic. A phone call the night before to say 'We're not going – the weather is against us!'
My third attempt was an action replay of the second. Only, this time, not to be disappointed we went to a very windy Mull of Galloway for a great day's birding.

On the quayside, the skipper's helper took great delight in telling us of the beautiful day he had yesterday and how calm it had been; but he wasn't sure of today. At last a decision, we were going, but the landing was very doubtful. I could hardly believe it – I was on my way! As we approached Ailsa Craig, it looked great. We sailed round the island. It was more than I had expected, with its rugged rock formation and its birds. As we approached the landing jetty we were being tossed about. No way we were going to land, but we went round again as a bonus. We approached the jetty again, the sea had calmed and the *Glorious* sailed right in. Could it be true? Yes, Ronnie had landed. After a great 2 hours on the island it was back to the high seas. At last we sailed into Girvan, soaked and cold, but nothing a fish supper couldn't sort out. What a day!

Ronnie Coombes

Goose catching in Iceland: in the footsteps of Scott

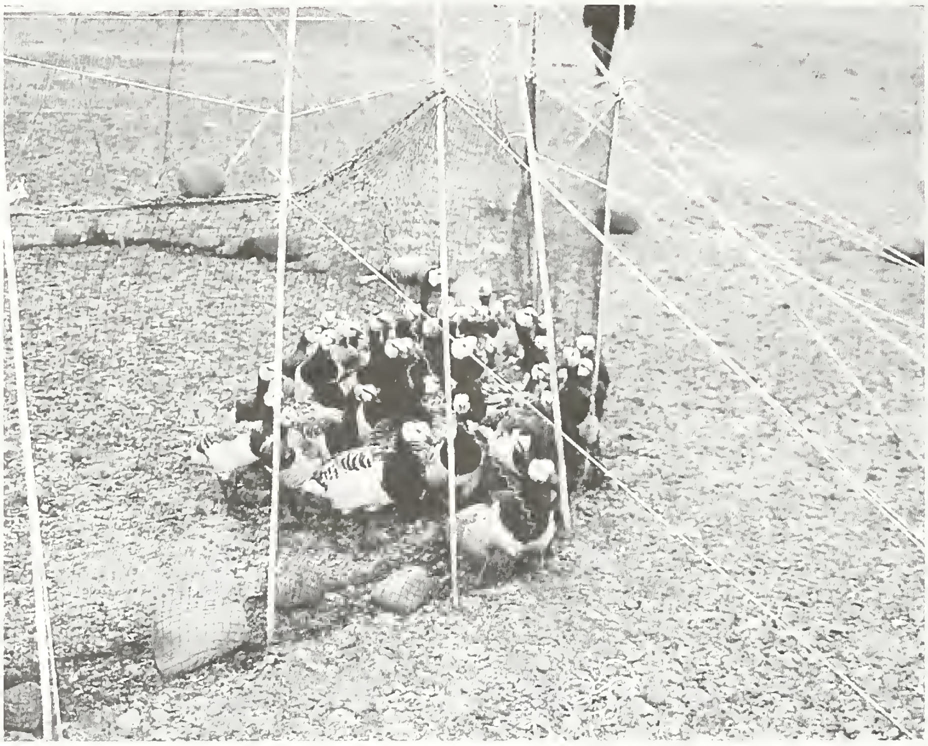
In the early 1950s the Wildfowl Trust under the supervision of Peter Scott began a large scale ringing project on geese. This involved many large rocket net catches of Greylags and Pinkfeet in Scotland. Scott followed this up in 1951 and 1953 with visits to Iceland, particularly Þjórsárver in central Iceland, where large numbers of flightless Pink-footed Geese were caught on their breeding grounds. This project was very successful and resulted in a vast number of ringing recoveries, showing the movement of the geese between their wintering and breeding grounds. As a result of this, interest in ringing grey geese waned.

Changes

Since the early 1950s things have changed a lot. Goose populations, generally, have increased dramatically and this has resulted in changes in breeding and wintering distribution. In the mid 1980s the WWT started a ringing programme on Pink-footed Geese, marking them with metal rings and numbered plastic leg rings so that they could be read by a telescope in the field. In 1992 the Highland Ringing Group in conjunction with the WWT began catching Greylag Geese at Loch Eye in easter Ross. These birds were BTO ringed, given a plastic leg ring or neck collar and dyed yellow on their tail coverts in order to gather information about movements and survival rates. During the 1990s it had become clear that although Pink-footed Goose populations remained very high, the Greylag Goose population had peaked in 1993 and was now showing signs of decline.

Licences

Iceland, despite being a small country, is a very forward thinking one. Hunting has long been a traditional pastime. Nowadays, before getting a licence to hunt, a potential hunter has to attend 2 different 4 hour lectures, one on guns and the other on bird identification, countryside laws and conservation issues and then pass 2 examinations before obtaining the licence. The licence has to be renewed each year for a fee and with a list of how many and of what species were shot during the year. The money raised from these licences is used to support research into quarry species. It was from this source that Arnór Sigfússon, from the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, obtained finance for a 5 year ringing project (which started in 1996) to investigate movements, survival and breeding performance of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Iceland. It was hoped that this, in conjunction with the work being carried out in Britain, would reveal amongst other things why Greylag Geese populations were now declining.



Barnacle Geese in round up pen in south Iceland *Bob Swann*

Due to my involvement with the Greylag Goose study in Scotland I was invited to join the Institute's team to help them catch and mark the geese in the summer of 1999. On arrival in Reykjavik I was met by Arnór and Richard Hearn from the WWT and, with the rest of the team, we headed to south Iceland after Greylags. The south of Iceland consists of a very wide, flat coastal plain. Much of it is 'sandur', large areas of sands and gravel deposited by vast complex glacial rivers, flowing out from the nearby ice caps. It is on coastal and riverine marshes adjacent to these rivers that Greylags nest. Being flightless and very vulnerable at this time of year the family parties were massing together adjacent to coastal lagoons or by fast flowing channels. In such open flat country they could easily spot us coming and quickly make their way onto water and to safety. After 3 days we had only caught one gosling and it was too small to ring! The hay fields in the south were full of waders: Redshank, Whimbrel, Oystercatcher, Snipe and Black-tailed Godwits. Whilst on the Sandurs Ringed Plovers and Arctic Terns and even Red-throated Divers nested amongst the Great Skuas.

Barnacle Geese

About 10 years ago Barnacle Geese had been reported as summering and possibly breeding in south Iceland. Arnór had received information that a small moulting flock on a moraine dammed lake close to one of the glaciers. We found the birds, 48 adults and 16 goslings, and managed, with the use of a farmers home made boat consisting of bits of aircraft fuselage and buoys, to coax the geese out of the water and into a hastily built pen. We caught 52 of them, the first ever catch of this species in Iceland, and marked them with blue darvik leg rings with white letters. We now wait expectantly to see where they are going to turn up in winter. Are they from the Greenland population and will they be found on Islay or are the lost Spitsbergen birds, which will turn up on the Solway? Keep your eyes peeled this winter!

Birds and blackflies

We decided to move on to north east Iceland, where Arnór knew it would be easier to catch the geese. The area around Eglisstadir is a bit like parts of the north west Highlands with low rocky ridges separated by hollows with lakes and marshes, where the geese grazed. We could use the ridges to creep up on the geese before making a mad dash to try and catch them in hand nets. This technique worked very well. Many of the geese, realising they could not escape to water, hid amongst the low willow scrub where we could easily find them. In this way in 3 days we caught 250 Greylags, 106 adults, 144 goslings. All were metal ringed and fitted with either a neck collar or a green darvik leg ring with 3 letters on it. We became celebrities, being filmed and interviewed for the national news on Icelandic TV. However, due to the swarms of blackflies, I preferred to remain anonymous with my midge net on, rather than have the glory of national recognition on TV! The surrounding marshes and pools were rich in bird life. Whimbrels and Golden Plovers were calling incessantly. The pools were occupied by Red-throated Divers with their chicks, little groups of spinning Red-necked Phalaropes and the occasional pair of Slavonian Grebes. Over head the alarm calls of a pair of Arctic Skuas alerted us to a passing Gyr Falcon. Time was getting short so we headed back to Reykjavik along the northern route. Passing through spectacular scenery; large wide straths, flat barren plateaux, lava flows adjacent to hot springs and boiling mud pots we reached the fabled Lake Myvatn. Myvatn is a very large low lying lake with numerous islands surrounded by farmland and, in the north, large lava flows and volcanic cones. It is full of duck and from the roads you can get spectacular views of Scaup, Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoters, along with Icelandic specialities like Great Northern Diver and Barrow's Goldeneye. Whilst on the lakes main outflow, the River Laxa, we had superb views of female Harlequin Ducks, the males having already departed to their coastal moulting grounds.

Catching Pinkfeet

We had a day in Reykjavik to recover before the next phase of our trip - to ∏jórsárver. We were to be the first group allowed into this fabled green oasis to catch Pinkfeet since Scott's expeditions in the early 1950s. Even the Icelanders on the trip were excited by the prospect as being a difficult area to get to only a few of them had ever visited it. The area is only accessible along tortuous 4x4 vehicle tracks along which we had to negotiate deep gullies, fast flowing glacial rivers, old lava fields and melting snow patches. To make matters worse low cloud in places hindered our progress as we tried to spot the wooden posts marking the track. It took us over 5 hours but we eventually made it to our bothy base. The next morning we woke up to a hot, sunny glorious day and made our first tentative steps into ∏jórsárver. The whole area lies below the Hofsjökull icecap. It is composed of low lying pools and marshes heavily vegetated but interspersed between low gravel ridges and glacial river channels. The whole area is surrounded by a great barren lava desert, hence the term oasis that Scott used for it. We did an initial recce and managed to catch 35 Pinkfeet and headed back to make plans. Scott had found that if you can surround a marsh the grazing geese, on being disturbed, will head for the highest point such as a gravel hill where they gather in flocks to see what is going on. Over the next 3 days we tried this technique. It proved very successful with catches of 211, 302 and 484 birds. Overall we ringed 524 goslings and 486 adults and also caught 2 birds that had been ringed at Loch Leven. It was, however, hard work. There is a strict policy in Iceland of not driving off track so we had to go by foot everywhere in ∏jórsárver. This meant long walks, often through bogs or up to our waists in very fast flowing and at times exceptionally cold glacial rivers. However the weather remained superb and at the end of it there was always a flock of geese waiting for us on the hill top. Snow Buntings, Golden Plovers, Dunlin and Purple Sandpipers kept us company whilst the surrounding scenery of mountain, glacier and river was quite superb.

Scott had ringed just over 1000 birds at ∏jórsárver in 3 weeks in 1951, but used Icelandic ponies to help surround the geese. We also did over 1000 in 4 days, but on foot, so we were delighted with our efforts. We caught on 3 of the hills that Scott had caught on. Unfortunately due to lack of time, and rings, we did not go to the areas further east where Scott's 1953 expedition had even larger catches.

Success

The 1999 Icelandic Institute of Natural History goose ringing expedition was the most successful so far of the series, marking over 1300 geese. This means that this year in Scotland a high percentage of geese will carry either a plastic leg ring or neck collar. These can be read, with a telescope, from the bottom up and should be reported to me or WWT, see notes at back of this newsletter. Iceland is a fantastic country, with superb and varied scenery and rich and abundant bird life.

There is also a strong environmental movement. Once again some of the main breeding and particularly moulting grounds of the geese are under threat from proposed hydro power schemes. These plans are being opposed. It is the hard facts that are generated from expeditions like this and from the data collected by long term goose counters and ring readers that will form the backbone to the objections to these proposals. Please help us by checking any flocks you see for marked birds.

Bob Swann

One of the flocks of Pinkfooted Geese in Iceland *Bob Swann*

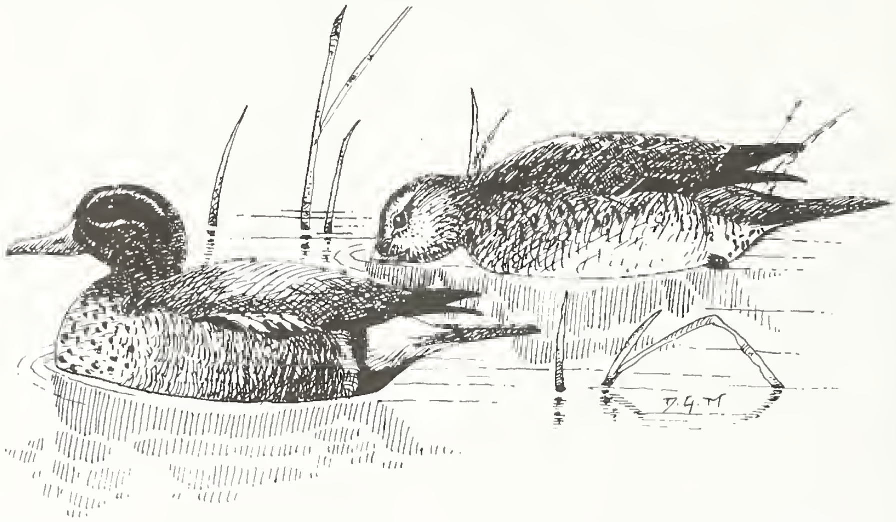
Wildfowl legislation - an historical review

The laws relating to the pursuit of wild mammals and birds in Britain date back to at least 1124. Initially these were largely to protect the hunting aspirations, including falconry, of the landed gentry and persisted largely unaltered up to the Victorian era of 1819-1901. Such early legislation only represented a small and restricted list of species considered as 'game', and there was little or no heed given to the conservation requirements of other species .

In Scotland it was not until James II decreed, in 1457, *'No one to destroy the nests of "pertriks, pluvars, wilde duks" or other wild fowl fit for food, or to kill the birds in moulting time'* that any consideration was given to the protection of species other than game.

Some of these early laws remain extant, though the penalties incurred for breaking them, which included the death penalty, amputation, imprisonment, transportation or being confined to the local stocks, have unfortunately been rescinded!

Queen Anne, in 1707, decreed that: *'any common fowlers found in any place with guns or nets, without permission shall be sent abroad as recruits'*



Teal *David Mitchell*

Legislation

The first legislation to govern the exploitation of all birds throughout Britain was the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1880. For the first time this provided a measure of protection to many species not specifically designated as game, at least in the provision of a close season. On a national basis this close season was decreed as covering the period between 2 March to 31 July. In a following amendment to the Act in 1886, the then regional administrations, the County Councils, were given added powers to either lengthen or shorten the season. In addition they had the authority to declare local bye laws without recourse to any Secretary of State to give any particular species regional protection

In effect this also put an onus on the local hunters, if they were to remain within the law they had to be aware of the different circumstances pertaining to the shooting dates and the species that were legal quarry. This was particularly difficult on the Solway estuary, where not only did county boundaries meet but national ones too.

Other additions and amendments to the 1880-1886 Act were made during the early part of the 20th century. In general the coastal wildfowler could either shoot or net all species of ducks, geese or waders, with the exception of the Shelduck, during the period 1August to 1 March provided they were not protected by a local bylaw. Thus, although ducks and waders were protected by a designated close season, wild geese were not; they could be shot or netted at any time of year, provided that the land owner's permission was received.

In an attempt to clarify the situation a new Act was introduced - The Wild Birds (Ducks and Geese) Protection Act, 1939. This laid down a new hunting season from 12 August to 31 January, with powers for County Councils to extend the period to 20 February in coastal areas. No attempt was made to limit the quarry list, thus it remained legal to kill any duck or goose, however rare, provided it was in season and not the subject of any local bylaw.

There then followed the enactment of the Protection of Birds Act, 1954, which it contained several significant changes. The shooting season was altered once more to the period 1 September to 31January, extended to the 20 February, below the high tide mark. In addition, and for the first time, the new Act decreed both a national list of quarry species and local variations were no longer permitted. This Act also made provision for the establishment of sanctuaries and for controlling the methods used to kill or take birds. By this action all reasonable local confusion was removed and flight netting was legally ended. In addition, it introduced the concept of licences to permit individuals to carry out activities otherwise prohibited by law. Further, it made provision for special protection of quarry species, mainly wildfowl and waders, during periods of severe weather.

In 1967, an amendment to this 1954 Act, prohibited the sale of dead wild geese. This was the result of sustained political lobbying by wildfowlers themselves, especially those based in central Scotland, alarmed at the huge bags being killed by commercial gunners in Perthshire, Fife and Angus. At times a few so called 'guides' were allowing the use of rifles fitted with telescopic sights and sound moderators *pers obs.* In the main, the huge, unacceptable kills were made by local market hunters.

In 1981, completely new legislation was enacted following the UK's entry into the European Economic Community in 1972. During the mid 1970s protracted negotiations took place within the Community in an attempt to rationalise the laws relating to the protection of European wildlife. Within the UK this resulted in the Wildfowl and Countryside Act, 1981. For the wildfowler, this meant the removal from the quarry list of the Curlew and the Redshank and a reduction in the quarry list, to include only 4 goose species (3 in Scotland), 9 duck species and the wader list reduced to a total of 3.

Although wildfowlers contested the loss of the Curlew and Redshank, the British breeding population of both had declined dramatically and has continued to do so despite full protection. However, in a quite remarkable and unfair contradiction, certainly to the sporting coastal gunner, another wader species, the Golden Plover, which similarly was and still is in decline, was retained. This was due largely to the influence of a few totally irresponsible but influential Peers, who considered the bird a delicacy and essential to be shot at during "boring lulls in grouse shooting". In a sport where participants have long been more representative of local working people and thus in the lower income brackets, this was inexcusable. Wildfowling often provided the only entré to the whole sphere of sporting shooting, that would otherwise be denied to them.

Thus in the century between the initial Wild Birds Protection Act 1880 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the list of quarry species available to the hunter has been reduced from over 200 species to the present 35, this total including species designated as either game or the so called pests.

Pest species

Within the period one bird has been added to the pest list, the Collared Dove. First recorded breeding in Lincolnshire in 1955, and in Scotland by 1957, it had by the mid 1960s, bred as far north as Shetland and as far west as the Outer Hebrides It was transferred from the specially protected to the pest category in 1967, only a decade following its first breeding in Britain.

The 1981 Act further reduced the list of pest species which may be killed by authorized persons, ie landowner or occupier or person with the landowners permission, at all times removing from it the Cormorant, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser,Rock Dove and Stock Dove and replacing orders relating to Raven and Barnacle Goose in specified areas. Thus all the strictly marine ducks, like the scoters, Long-tailed Duck, Scaup and Eider were fully protected as were all but 3 waders and 4 geese (3 in Scotland). As in the previous Act, provision has been retained for the issue of licences to allow otherwise prohibited actions to be taken for specified purposes. Licences for killing birds in order to prevent damage to crops or fisheries may be issued by the Scottish Office, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department (SOAEFD) and, in England, by the, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Birds most likely to be involved in licence procedures are geese, Cormorants, the saw billed ducks and the Grey Heron. The latter can be readily discouraged from taking fish by much less draconian measures and scientific proof is not conclusive, regarding the effects of the other fish eating birds. Not withstanding, in the 14 month period up to December 1983, 347 Goosanders and 523 Red-breasted Mergansers, were reported to have been killed in Scotland under licence.

Licences to take birds by netting for scientific research, ie to catch and release during ringing studies, are required from the Department of the Environment and the British Trust for Ornithology. The list of wildfowl and waders that may now be legally hunted in Britain, outwith the close season, are: Mallard, Teal, Pintail, Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Wigeon, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Greylag Goose, Pink-footed Goose, European White-fronted Goose, (England and Wales only) Canada Goose, Golden Plover, Common Snipe and Woodcock.

SOC Photographic Competition winner
Snipe *Dennis Johnson*

Enforcement

Since the law makes it an offence to harm these species enforcement is in the hands of the police and the procurator fiscal in Scotland. Where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that an offence has taken place, the police have wide powers to stop, search and arrest people to enter land to seize evidence and to enter premises. If anyone observes anything suspicious, for example a protected bird that appears to have been shot poisoned or being netted, one should inform the police as soon as possible. Very substantial fines can be imposed on anyone found guilty of these offences and in some circumstances offenders may receive a custodial sentence.

Wildfowling

In conclusion I feel sympathy is due to the coastal wildfowlers. Over the years they have lost out due to the revisions of the various Acts. There is little evidence to support claims that organised and controlled coastal wildfowling is at all responsible for the very obvious decline in British breeding ducks and waders nor in the declining numbers of immigrant quarry species. Punt gunning is frequently cited as particularly destructive of wildfowl populations, but only 5 professional hunters were alive prior to 1940, the few amateur or part time fowlers that did or currently participate do not kill significant numbers (Allison, Blackett & Young, *The Scottish Sporting Gazette* No 18 1998).

Quite rightly, conservationists and wild fowlers are now very concerned about the decline in numbers of some resident and immigrant ducks and waders, and one can only hope that it will only be a matter of time before pressure is mounted, to seek added protection for Teal, Pintail, Gadwall, Golden Plover, Common Snipe and Woodcock.

There is little doubt that the massive decreases noted in populations of ducks and waders is a direct result of diminishing habitat, together with a pronounced reduction in land and water quality. Unfortunately the drive towards increased and cheaper food production, which this country undoubtedly enjoys, has led agriculturalist to over exploit the environment. Grant aided hill and lowland drainage schemes as well as reducing habitat, have impacted on invertebrate populations important to both young and adult birds as a food source. In addition, insecticides and pesticides associated with extensive arable farming have compromised many once diverse ecosystems. Intensive cereal and grass production have contributed to the numbers of some species of wintering geese reaching localised pest proportions though indigenous game species, especially the Grey Partridge have crashed.

Ironically recognised pests such as Rabbits, crows, gulls and Wood Pigeons also continue to increase.

John Young

The BTO in Scotland

BTO members in Scotland have been advised of the BTO's new Scottish development and have been asked to help in finding a suitable candidate for the position of head of BTO in Scotland. This challenging opportunity for a person with outstanding drive and the ability to make a major contribution to the development of Scottish ornithology and conservation was advertised in October 1999.

The BTO in Scotland will be established in the form of an office in Edinburgh, in the early months of 2000, in the premises of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, initially staffed by a full time head and a part time secretary.

The aims of the BTO in Scotland initiative are to, ensure that the work of BTO in Scotland is focused on Scottish priorities; increase the coverage of current ornithological surveys in Scotland; Increase the quantity of ornithological survey and research work in Scotland; organise the 2001 Peregrine Survey and increase the support for the long term work of the BTO in Scotland.

Initial funding for the initiative has been provided by BTO, Scottish Natural Heritage and by the Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust. The BTO will also seek support from Scottish charitable trusts and businesses to maintain the momentum of the initiative. It is anticipated that within 3–5 years, BTO in Scotland will have scientific, survey organisation and membership development capacity requiring at least 4 staff.

Jeremy Greenwood

SOC/BTO birdwatchers' conference

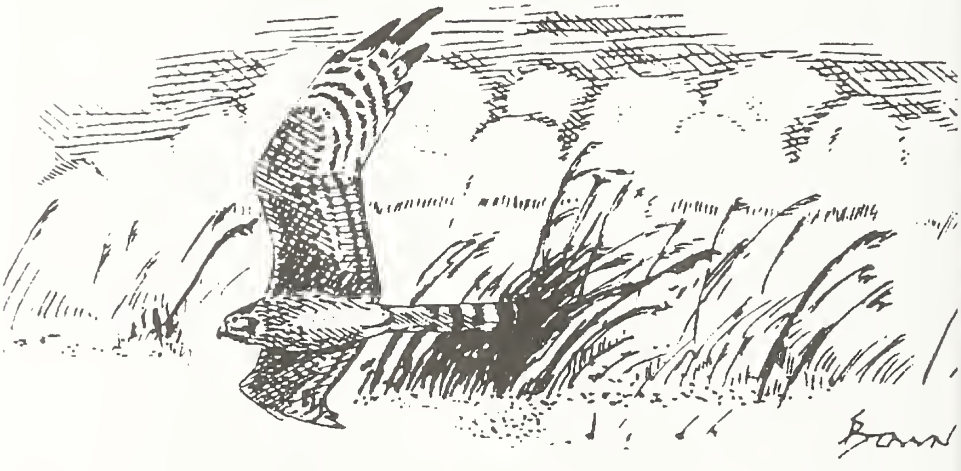
It is rather fitting that 10 years after the Dumfries Branch last hosted this conference it is returning to South West Scotland. This time, the region's 3 branches, West Galloway, Stewartry and Dumfries, are the joint hosts with the theme "Changes in Bird Populations".

The region consists of the 3 counties of Wigtownshire, the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright and Dumfriesshire, and has the doubtful honour of having had the highest percentage of changes in land use in Scotland since the 1940s. Over 25% of the region is now under trees, of which 93% are coniferous, and seas of sterile silage fields multiply annually whilst drainage of wet meadows goes on apace. What has been the effect of these and many other changes upon our wildlife?

Chris Rollie, always so enthusiastic, will set the scene. The story of a new breeding bird to the region will follow. Hear how the entire Svalbard Goose population, once down to less than 1,000, now numbers well over 20,000. Is the region still one of the UK's strongholds for the Barn Owl? The worrying loss of so many farmland birds elsewhere will be compared with the way the WWT and the RSPB are running their farms for the benefit of wildlife. Has conifer afforestation given us more gains than losses of bird species? Ian Newton will round off the conference on one of the longest running UK studies of a bird of prey.

We hope to see you all at the Barony College, Parkgate, Dumfries on Saturday 11 March 2000.

Joan Howie



Hen Harrier

Steven Brown

March birdwatching in Dumfries and Galloway

Why come to the South West just to attend a conference? Why not come for the weekend or, better still, even longer? This is undoubtedly one of the best times of the year for birdwatching in this area. Although there will not be any organised excursions, several local birdwatchers should be on hand at some sites to show conference delegates around.

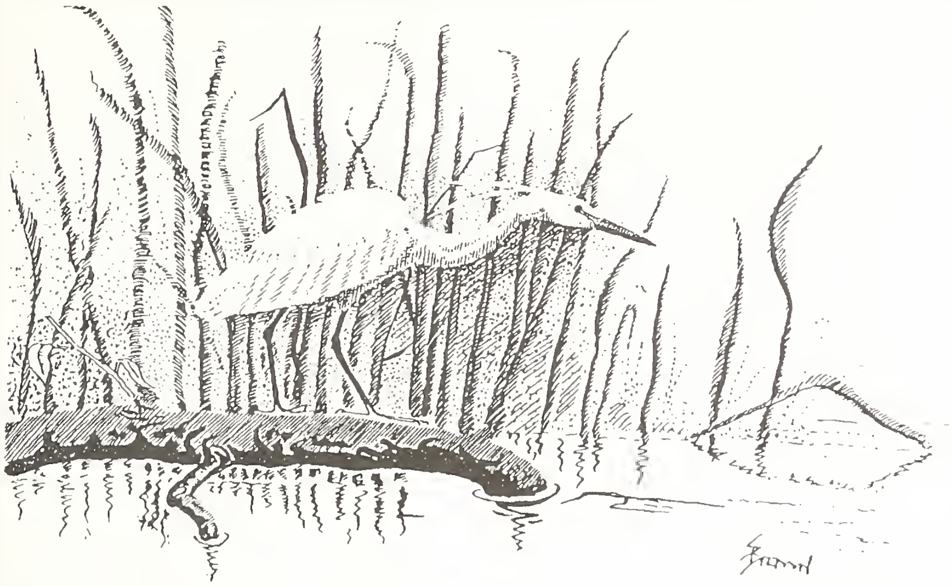
You cannot possibly come down to this region without visiting the WWT Caerlaverock Reserve where you will see large numbers of wintering duck and geese. Including possibly as many as 20,000 Barnacle Geese. A Barn Owl hunting in daylight could be a highlight. Further west the coast at Carsethorn and Southerness are amongst the best places to see really large flocks of wintering waders. Over 15 species occur, including nationally important numbers of Oystercatchers. A small flock of Purple Sandpipers haunts the rocks off Southerness lighthouse. Large rafts of Scaup are usually on the sea off Carsethorn. No one should go home without a visit to the RSPB Mersehead Reserve that has at least 10 species of wintering duck, finch flocks, waders and thousands of geese. Dumfries and Galloway is a marvellous area for predators, with Caerlaverock and Mersehead usually producing hunting Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin, Sparrowhawks, Buzzards, Kestrels and Barn Owls. To see our flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese head up the west side of Loch Ken. We hope some of our visitors will be able to combine an enjoyable conference with some exciting birdwatching.

Joan Howie

Never mind the quality

The launch of the first Scottish branch of the Swedish furniture giants, IKEA, near Edinburgh recently included some regrettable stereotypes of life in Scotland on the part of their advertisers who were roundly criticised for denigrating Harris Tweed as old fashioned and uncomfortable. They seem to be even more ill informed on the wildlife front. A radio advert based on the 'sounds of Scotland' included the 'shrill cry of the Golden Eagle', which will surprise all those who know how silent these birds usually are. It seems the advertisers like many tourists can't tell the difference between Golden Eagles and Buzzards.

It's October, so it must be Cyprus



Great White Egret *Steven Brown*

On the morning of Saturday 9 October another one of Tony Scott's SOC trips set off for Cyprus, with myself as bird leader. Arriving late in the evening at Paphos, we were met by our Cypriot hosts, Ali and Kathleen Agathocleous, before being driven to the C&A apartments in Polis (No, not that C&A!nor does Polis mean in Cyrpus what it does in Glasgow!).

Next morning was spent scouring the bushes and fields between the apartments and the beach and, with some thundery weather in the offing, a big flock of 200 Alpine Swifts came through along with the first Eleonora's Falcon. In the afternoon we had good views of a juvenile White-winged Black Tern and some of the party saw their first Cyprus Warbler.

Early morning on the 11th was spent locally looking for migrants. The afternoon drive to Aphrodite's Bath was punctuated by a fairly rapid stop *en route* to see 4 Great White Egrets and a large flock of 200 Garganeys disturbed by a passing boat. A sunny evening stroll on the seaward side of Polis gave good views of Hobby and Black Francolin for a few of the party.

Another early outing on the following morning provided Black Francolin for 'all' (sighs of relief!) along with close encounters with Fan–tailed Warblers. During the early afternoon, Ali took us to a spot near Ineia to look for raptors but we had to make do with a Common Crane instead. However, more soon followed, with a splendid male Finsch's Wheatear, a juvenile Montagu's Harrier, and excellent views of Tawny Pipits. Two adult Bonelli's Eagles above the Avgas Gorge put in a spectacular display for us later on. An exploration of this gorge produced the peculiar sounds of both Little Owl and Fruit Bat! before more people in the group caught up with Cyprus Warbler.

The morning of the 13th found us at our second location, in Paphos, and the early part of the day was spent looking for and finding up to 3 Greater Sand Plovers near the lighthouse. An afternoon trip to Asprokremnos Dam gave great views of a male Bluethroat, followed by a stunning Little Owl and another White-winged Black Tern, 2 Eleonora's Falcons and our first Blue Rock Thrush.

Perhaps the best day of the trip was the 14th when those of us still struggling to catch up with Cyprus Warbler were rewarded by views of a male at Aphrodite's Birthplace. Phassouri marshes, dry though they were, still held 3 Montagu's Harriers, almost within touching distance, 3 Marsh Harriers, a beautiful Roller, even more Hobbies and a young Lesser Grey Shrike. Kensington Cliffs were visited on the way back, and what an end to the day! Although we only saw one roosting Griffon Vulture, the sky was full of adult and juvenile Eleonora's Falcons putting on breathtaking aerial displays.

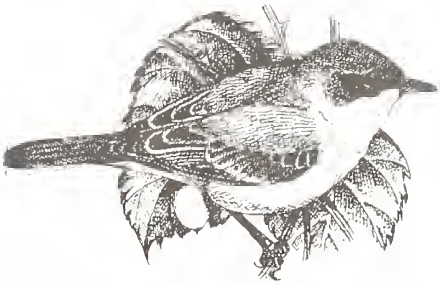
Our last day was undertaken at a leisurely pace with a trip into the mountains. Cyprus Coal Tit put on a good show for us, along with a few Serins and a Montpelier Snake, at a respectable distance. Cypriots know how to eat and drink well and lunch filled most of the rest of the day, with a huge meal at Alona followed, by those still able to walk with strange high altitude species like Robin and Wren!

Our departure on the morning of the 16th was made more bearable by our second Roller at the entrance to the airport. Arriving back at Manchester at 15.30, the weather was still pleasant but the sounds of approaching winter could be heard in the night skies above Carlisle as several Redwings called overhead.

Angus Hogg

Offshore bird bonanza

A reward for regular watching, both on and offshore, is that from time to time you get a run of birds out of the ordinary. This is well illustrated by Lenny Simpson. 'As is usually the case with the rarer birds, an east or south easterly wind was blowing when many of the following species were found. The story starts on 7 May on the 'Maersk Curlew' platform when a female Red-footed Falcon was on the helideck and, as I approached, I noticed a Merlin and a Kestrel nearby. The next day, a male Kestrel joined these 3! Also on the 8th, I saw a Hoopoe from the TV lounge and on going down to get a better view, found 2 Shore Larks. July can be a quiet month, but on the 21st I found an adult Sabine's Gull and a Little Tern. Southerly winds on the 6th September produced a Goshawk and Lesser Whitethroat. South easterlies again on the 15th September brought a possible Black-eared Wheatear, which was taken by a Sparrowhawk as I watched! The highlight came on the 16th when a Red-throated Pipit walked towards me and hopped onto my hand! Unfortunately it died later, and the corpse is now at Culterty'.



Lesser Whitethroat Ayrshire Bird Report

Whilst Lenny has submitted descriptions for all the above if accepted, the Red-footed Falcon, Black-eared Wheatear and Red-throated Pipit will constitute 3 new offshore records.

Extracted from *The Fulmar*

The 'Maersk Curlew' platform lies 225km due east of Montrose. Eds

REVIEWS

***Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol 5 Barn Owls to Hummingbirds** by Josep del Hoyo et al. Lynx Edicions 1999. 759pp. ISBN 84-87334-25-3 £110*

This is arguably the most important of all the volumes to be published, as it contains the impressive hummingbird family, with 328 species, the second largest family in the avian world. Surprisingly, no in depth monograph had been published of this important family. For the first time the complete range of this family in all their eloquent and gaudy plumes are depicted in clear pictorial forms that are an aid to identification.

Within the same volume, we also have the popular owls, the mystical nightjars and the elusive swifts. Taxonomic advancements in knowledge of the small South American owls in recent years created more confusion than clarification, but this complicated group is clearly laid out in this work. As in previous volumes the standard of photography is of the highest level.

It is difficult to find fault with this as with the other volumes. Perhaps though more recognition could have been given to the south-east Brazilian race of Glittering-throated Emerald *Polyerata fimbriata tephrocephala* which although similar in plumage to the nominate form is markedly larger, to the point of appearing a different species. This is mentioned in the text but could have been emphasised pictorially. If you birdwatch globally, this set is a must.

Bruce Forrester

***Dictionary of Bird Artists of the World** by Christine E Jackson, 1999. Antique Collectors' Club. 550 pp. £45 hardback. ISBN 1-85149-203-8*

This monumental volume is the sixth major title from an acknowledged expert in bird art. With over 4000 entries for artists worldwide, excluding contemporary artists, it appears to be very comprehensive. The author provides dates and bibliography. Some 200 paintings and illustrations are reproduced in colour and black and white prints. An appendix provides a survey of each country's major bird artists as well as a list of artists for each nation. This is an absolute mine of information for serious students of bird art and an invaluable source reference for the collectors.

David Clugston

***Uova e nidi degli uccelli d'Italia** by Aldo Pazzuconi. Published by Calderini, Bologna, Italy, 1997. 655pp. ISBN 88-8219-014-5. Hardback It.L 85,000*

Although written in Italian, clear headings and terminology make it easy to follow. Each of the 256 species covered is given a 2 page spread, detailing distribution, habitat, nest placement, nest, eggs, breeding period, clutch size and incubation. A table provides biometrical data on shell length and breath, fresh weight and eggshell weight; additionally, means and standard deviations are provided. The species descriptions also include good photographs of the eggs or nest in situ. There is also a comprehensive bibliography and indices to scientific, Italian, German, English and French names. The 95 egg plates are outstanding.

This book calls to mind Wolfgang Makatsch's *Die Eier der Vogel Europas* (1974-76), for long a standard reference work for European birds eggs. In comparison with *Uova e nidi*, the former now seems very dated and I believe that Aldo Pazzuconi has shown the way ahead for literature on this rather neglected area of ornithology. This is a beautifully produced book and I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the subject.

Bob McGowan

Heron *David Mitchell*

***Herons and Egrets of the World – A Photographic Journey** by James Hancock 208pp. Academic Press 1999. Paperback £24.95. ISBN 0-12-322725-9*

In this book, the only complete review of the world's herons currently in print, James Hancock distils his knowledge into a concise review of all 47 species and recognised sub species. The text comprises a thumbnail sketch and descriptions of the appearance, distribution conservation status, feeding and breeding ecology of each species. Over 150 wonderful colour photographs, most by the author, show all the recognisable forms of each species, illustrating the variety and beauty of these birds. This book contains brief notes, a few excellent photographs and a small scale distribution map of each species.

John Law

***In Search of Ross's Gull** by Michael Densley 1999. Peregrine Books, 268 pp. £34.95 hardback. ISBN 09-520268-6-4.*

Few birds excite birdwatchers more than Ross's Gull; whenever and wherever they appear they are eagerly watched. The author has had a life long passion for this enigmatic species and the fruits of his research and travels are documented in this well laid out volume.

The book is packed with detail, not only on the biology, seasonal distribution and movements of the bird but with a wealth of data on the many other species in Alaska and Siberia. It is well illustrated with 80 colour photographs and several maps. An extensive bibliography and index completes the book.

I warmly recommend this book to the collectors of bird monographs, gull enthusiasts and interested naturalists.

David Clugston

***The Birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula** by David R Wells. Volume 1: Non Passerines. Academic Press. 1999. 648 pages. ISBN 0-12-7-742961-1 Hardback £65.00*

This mighty tome represents the first of a 2 volume set covering the birds of southern Thailand, peninsular Malaysia and associated island archipelagos. In all some 385 of the 680 species are dealt with. It follows the usual format with a very good introductory chapter describing the review area, habitat categories and species assemblages. The species accounts are well laid out and include distribution range maps. For many species much still remains to be discovered. A centre section contains the 69 full colour plates by 8 different artists. To my eye they are variable in quality and more reminiscent of the old handbook style.

This is a scholarly work and a great advance on anything so far produced for this important area. The book is an invaluable reference and should be an essential addition to any serious ornithological library.

David Clugston

***Where to watch birds in Mexico** by Steve N G Howell. 1999.Christopher Helm (A&C Black), London. 365 pp. Paperback £19.99 ISBN 0-7136-5087-7*

This further addition to the Helm series of birdwatching in different countries provides an excellent and detailed guide to birding in Mexico. After a valuable introduction on when, where and how to visit Mexico, the guide divides the country into 14 areas, each with a characteristic climate and avifauna. Within each area, up to 12 sites are described, most with a full list of the birds to be expected and many with maps showing where the specialities might be found. The lists are mouth-watering and these make a visit to Mexico a 'must' on my wish list of places to go bird-watching.

Ray Murray

Island Eagles – 20 years observing Golden Eagles on the Isle of Skye *by Ken Crane and Kate Nellist. 142pp Cartwheeling Press. Paperback £10.00 ISBN 0-9536033-0.*

This is one of those rare books written by enthusiasts and absolutely full of personal observations collected in the field. No matter how bad the weather, they would be out in the mountains watching their favourite birds. To know 11 eagles of at least 20 years of age is quite amazing. To have personally observed 26 successful hunts by eagles is a sure sign of dedicated fieldwork.

This book is a tribute to their long hours in the field and to their love and concern for Golden Eagles.

Sylvia Laing

Rare Birds of the Netherlands *by Arnoud B van den Berg and Cecilia A W Bosman Pica press, 1999. 397 pp. ISBN 90-74345-13-1. Hardback £30*

This book impresses immediately on opening and first thoughts are quickly confirmed by the clarity of presentation and comprehensive cover of the 468 species recorded over 2 centuries in the Netherlands. Though the book obviously concentrates on the rarer birds, all species are included, with brief notes and seasonal bar charts for those considered as regular or common.

Keith Macgregor

I was interested to read in *SBN* September 1999 of the new *Collins Bird Guide* by Mullarney *et al.* Your reviewer may not have noticed an error in the index of this book, in that there is no entry for **Tern**, with all species of Tern and Teal mixed together under the heading **Teal.** I have written to Harper Collins, the publishers of the books, and await their comments.

R B Napier

The Fulmar Web site

The Fulmar is the bulletin of the North Sea Bird Club and has its own web site at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/nsbc/. The office of the Secretary, **Mark Thomson, is at 67 – 72, Regent Quay, Aberdeen.**

The Game Conservancy Trust Web site

The Trust has recently relaunched its web site. You can visit the site at http://www.game-conservancy.org.uk/

ISLE OF TIREE- HYNISH CENTRE

Discover the fascinating island of Tiree!

Corncrakes, Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Orchids, Otters, Seals.
Dramatic coastal scenery, gentle walks.
Local history talks & archive. Pony trekking. Cycling, Golf (9 holes). Ceilidh evenings.
Twin or bunk rooms for groups of up to 32.
In house catering. Self drive minibus available. Large communal rooms and hall.
Sailings from Oban (call 0990 650000) - Flights from Glasgow (call 0345 222111)

The Hynish Centre lies within some areas with unique natural history. Otters frequent the adjacent rocky coastlines and freshwaters. In May and June, the rasping call of the Corncrake, one of Europe's rarest birds, can be heard from the open windows of the Centre. Throughout the summer the surrounding pastures are rich in orchids. The Common Spotted Orchid is ubiquitous but, for the specialist, there are Early Purple, Pyramidal, Lesser Butterfly and Frog Orchids to be hunted down through the summer. Buzzards raise their young from an eyrie on the overlooking hill and Peregrine Falcons feed their young on Rock Doves that roost in the deep caves of Ceann a' Mhara. These cliffs are also home for hundreds of seabirds such as Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes. Nearby, in the late summer, Grayling Butterflies are found in sheltered glades sunning themselves on the warm rocks. However, perhaps one of the most spectacular scenes is the flowering of the machair (rich seaside grasslands) in May and June when the pasture turns brilliant yellow with a continuous carpet of Buttercups and when the Ragged Robin blooms in the marshes.The resource offered by Hynish is unique, an opportunity to exploit the fascinating environment of Tiree for fieldwork. The new annex, Morton Boyd House, is now available. It provides a modern hall/ workshop/ conference area fully heated with electricity, workbenches and a separate shower/ toilet block. An additional level of superior accommodation is provided, which can be used by group leaders (2 twin rooms). Also disabled bathroom facilities/ ground floor rooms have been added and the possibility of a package of mixed self-catering and catered accommodation gives maximum price flexibility. Named after the eminent Hebridean ecologist, Morton Boyd House is a comfortably fitted converted smithy opening onto a small sandy beach in an area of remarkable natural heritage and beauty. There is a modern, fully equipped kitchen. An old forge forms the centrepiece to a comfortably fitted living room with TV, video and stereo. The Hebridean Trust (reg. Charity No. 285629), designed and manages the property with both the active and less able in mind.

ACCOMMODATION BOOKINGS 01879 220726 ADMIN 01865 311468

LETTERS

St John's Town of Dalry
Kirkcudbrightshire

With the prospect of the SOC moving from its home for the past 40 years in 21 Regent Terrace we have the chance to become a truly **Scottish** Club. For many of us in the far flung corners of Scotland the Club has often appeared to be much too Edinburgh orientated and, at times, to be run by the 'Edinburgh Mafia'. The E O C ?!

The Equal Opportunities Commission? Ed.

Let us grasp this opportunity to move to a more central location. We would require to be on both a bus and a train route and close to the central road artery, the A9. Stirling, Dunblane? A central location, such as Perth, where there is no SOC branch, would be an added challenge. With the SOC headquarters on their doorstep any town should be able to build up a thriving branch which should then be able to provide the volunteers always required by head office.

With today's modern communications there is no need to remain 'off centre' in Edinburgh. Let us become a truly Scottish club as opposed to an Edinburgh biased one. This is an opportunity to obtain a real headquarters which members from the north, the south, the west and, not least from the east (Edinburgh) can all reach with as near equal ease as possible.

Yours with regretful thoughts of leaving Regent Terrace but with hope of a more central future,

Or

Yours with a sorry heart of leaving number 21 but with hopes of moving to the heart of Scotland!

Joan Howie

St John's, Newfoundland
Canada

I am surprised to see that there were no further replies to the communication between Rob Lambert and Chris Mylne *SBN 54* regarding the long term decline in the membership of the SOC. Perhaps I shouldn't be, given that No.55 has lost the word 'news' from the regular *SBN* title banner! Anyway, since no one else has cared to comment, I'll throw in my own 2 penneth worth ...

Much as I hate to admit it, I have to agree with Chris Mylne that the SOC is not a nature conservation charity and we certainly do not have the resources, nor the will I imagine, to set up the nature trails, hides, etc. that Rob Lambert would like to see. That kind of work is the responsibility of organisations such as SNH, the RSPB and SWT. However, the SOC certainly should take an advisory role in such matters and help guide these organisations in identifying areas of concern and designing management plans.

On the other hand, I certainly don't want to see SOC remain a 'jolly old club' either. We do need to improve the SOC's image somehow. In my view, our very name provides direction – we are not about bird watching, birding or twitching, our interest in ornithology – the scientific study of birds, unites us!

I believe the greatest ambassadors for any scientific organisation are its publications. *Scottish Bird News* is very good and I look forward to its arrival. The *Scottish Bird Report* is clearly a valuable and important record of observations. *Scottish Birds*, however, has deteriorated somewhat in the 15 or so years I have been a member. Just think of the number of errata and serious printing problems we have seen in previous years. This is clearly no one person's fault and I do not intend to criticise particular individuals. I recognise that editors and their support staff have a difficult and arduous enough task! *Scottish Birds* provides a wonderful forum with a strong tradition of enabling non professional ornithologists to publish their work. This will have greater impact if it is published in a journal with a solid scientific reputation that is not constantly beset with errors and printing problems.

This is certainly not impossible for a small organisation such as the SOC. Look at the Seabird Group and Dutch Seabird Group's combined new journal *Atlantic Seabirds* for an example of high quality science, clearly written, well illustrated and neatly packaged.

However, just as our editor pointed out in comments in *SBN* 54, such advances can only be made if the membership is keen enough to make it happen. I hope through open discussion, we can both recognise our limitations and build upon our strengths. We must move into the next Millennium with a clear view of our past contribution and our future goals in Scottish ornithology and in nature conservation generally.

I look forward to reading other views on this matter in SBN.

Ian Stenhouse

We understand that the comments about Scottish Birds refer not to content, which is now subject to refereeing (not always the case in the past), but to printing problems, presentation and errata. It would be interesting to know if other readers feel that there is a serious problem over Scottish Birds; the feedback we receive is generally favourable within the context of our limited resources. The acceptance rate is the highest we know for any ornithological journal.

The printer has recently been changed and information on printing costs are in the Club's Annual Report. Available evidence suggests that SBN is more important than SB from the point of view of most members and as a possible recruitment method. However, the points usually raised about membership need to address fact that organisations with bigger memberships are seen as providing specific services to their members, notably entrance to reserves, which the SOC does not. We are always interested to see other examples of small circulation journals and newsletters. However the ones that we are most often compared to ie Bird Study and BTO News have rather more resources than SOC publications. Eds

Whooper Swan *Sam Alexander*

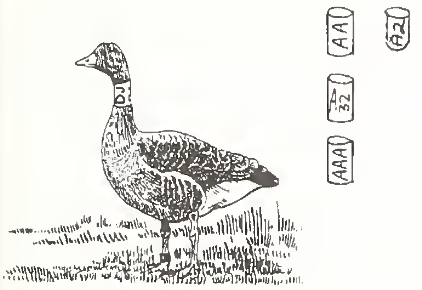
REQUESTS

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

As part of a long term study of Aberdeen's roof nesting Oystercatchers, we are fitting the birds with Darvic rings on the left leg. These rings are white or yellow and bear a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits, *eg* A26, reading down the leg. We would be grateful for any sightings, even incomplete ones, and can provide a prompt history. Please inform either: **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS (01224 483717)** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Aberdeen AB23 8PP (01224 823184).**

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329).**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Neck collared Whooper Swans

Since 1990 Whooper Swans have been marked in Germany using yellow neck collars. Up to spring, 1999 c100 individual birds had been marked with yellow neck collars. Please send sightings including site (country, area, coordinates), date, size of group, partner of the bird sighted, number of offspring of the pair, and habitat to: **Axel Degen, Tannenburgstr. 11, D-49084 Osnabrueck, Germany. Email: Axel-Degen@t-online.de**

Neck collared White-fronted Geese

In 1998 the University of Osnabruck (Dept of Ethology, Goose Research Group) in cooperation with IBN-DLO, started putting black neck collars with white codes on White-fronted Geese. These are similar to the ones used on Greylags in Scandinavia. They are composed of one big upright letter and 2 smaller numbers below arranged at a right angle.

Please send any information of sightings (country, area, co-ordinates), date, size of group, partner of bird sighted, number of offspring of the pair, and habitat, to; **Prof Dr Hans-Heiner Bergman, University of Osnabrueck, AG Ganseforschung, Barbarastr. 11, D-49069 Osnabrueck, Germany.Email: bergmann@biologie.uni-osnabrueck.de.** Further information can be seen at http://members.aol.com/Kruckenbrg/

White-fronted Goose *Steven Brown*

Annual General Meeting

The SOC's 63rd AGM was held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore on 30 October, 1999. After apologies for absence the Minutes of the 62nd AGM held in 1998 were approved, with no matters arising. Both the Annual Report and the Annual Accounts for 1998-99 were approved. The Treasurer reported that many members had joined the Direct Debit scheme for subscription payments and he hoped more would do so.

After serving for an extra year, making 3 in all, Ian Darling retired as President. Brian Downing was then elected as the new President, with Ian Andrews as Vice President. Peter Vandome was re-elected as Treasurer. Two Council Members , Joan Howie and Bob Swann retired and were replaced by Bruce Lynch and Clive Walton. Two very long standing members of the SOC then had the honour of nominating and seconding the usual appointment of A W Scotland as Auditor.

Under Item 11, Any Other Business, Ian Darling outlined the position regarding the Club's premises for the past 40 years at 21, Regent Terrace. He listed reasons for staying and reasons for leaving and explained that without the rent from the upper 2 floors, now that the RSPB had moved, there would be a gap in the accounts. He said "there is no time scale for making a decision, no deadline, but the sooner the question is tackled the better". The current value of the property is estimated at £400-450,000. A member said that before any decisions to sell No 21 and to replace it, the Club should decide as the first priority where we should move to. The Library was a unique resource, but sadly underused. However, the opinion was that it must remain with the Club. Ian Darling explained that the future of the Club's premises would be a Council decision, supported by the Management Committee.

Finally, Brian Downing paid tribute to our popular and efficient past President, Ian Darling, and thanked him for all his hard work. The Club Secretary, Sylvia Laing, was also thanked for all her efforts over the past year.

Joan Howie

Butterfly records for the New Millennium Atlas

Members who were at Annual Conference in Newtonmore had the opportunity to collect recording forms to allow them to submit records for inclusion in the new Butterfly Atlas, on schedule for publication in autumn, 2000. All records have to be submitted, processed and checked by the end of December, 1999 so if you want to your name and records to be included you will need to get a move on. If you miss the deadline please still send in your records for 1995–1999. Now that we have a national database it will be constantly updated and past records can always be added. Please send yours records directly to **Richard Sutcliffe, Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow, G3 8AG.** Richard or I can supply additional copies of the recording form. **Pete Kinnear, 20 East Queen Street, Newport-on-Tay DD6 8AY. 01382 541383**

Small Copper Butterfly *David Mitchell*

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1999 were:

July - 1st £30 R Caine, Eyemouth; 2nd £20 A Sprott, Bonnyrigg; 3rd £10 F Hamilton, Longniddry.
August - 1st £50 F Hewlett, West Calder; 2nd £30 S Howe, Torphins; 3rd £20 D Clugston, Barrhead; 4th £10 J Wills, Inverurie.
September - 1st £30 N Grist, Glasgow; 2nd £20 S Taylor, St. Andrews; 3rd £10 R Cowper, Edinburgh.

You can always join the 200 Club, if you are over 18. If you join now please send a cheque for £6, payable to the 'SOC 200 Club' and this will cover the rest of our 'year' until 31 May 2000; It will be acknowledged with thanks.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896) 822176

Scottish Birds

The Editorial Committee agreed to change *Scottish Birds* from a 4 issue volume to a 2 issue volume after the publication of Volume 20:2 in December 1999. *Scottish Birds* continues to publish papers relevant to Scottish ornithology, particularly on the numbers and distributions of Scottish birds. We have a policy of helping inexperienced authors. However we do often have to ask authors to alter their papers or reduce them to notes. For further advice contact the Editor.

Raptor Round Up

It is hoped to produce a double issue in 2000 covering the years 1998 and 1999 if funding can be obtained.

SOC Web site

As you will see at the front of this issue the SOC has now launched its Web site **http://www.the-soc.org.uk** at the begining of December. Ian Andrews our new Vice-President has agreed to be the editor of the Web site, and has been appointed to the Editorial Committee. We also thank Ian for his assistance with this issue of *SBN*.

Appeal for speakers for branch programmes

The arrangements for compiling the programme of winter lectures for Branches has been discussed by the Management Committee, following a request from Council that they should consider improvements to the procedure. It has been agreed that HQ will continue to try and provide a 'big name' speaker each year. A small sub committee will be formed to identify other potential speakers. Members and branches are asked to submit names of likely individuals who can be approached for the 2000/2001 winter season.

South East Scotland Discussion Group - dates for 2000

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets regularly on the first Wednesday of the winter months (except January), in the Waterston Library, Regent Terrace, Edinburgh at 7.30 pm to consider reports of and arrangements for survey work, and other matters of conservation interest. Any member of the Club is welcome to attend. There is no charge for admission, although a silver collection is taken for refreshments. The current Chairman of the Group is Mark Holling (0131 446 9098 - evenings) whom you should contact if you wish to bring any particular item to the attention of the Group. Dates of meetings are:

12 January, 2000 (one week later than usual due to the Millennium celebrations); 2 February, 2000; 1 March, 2000; 5 April, 2000; 6 September, 2000; 4 October, 2000; 1 November, 2000 and 6 December, 2000.

Bob Lambie

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of Bob Lambie in October. Bob was an active member of the Clyde Branch, a regular on the lecture circuit and his award winning photographs were always much admired. Sincere condolences go to his wife Una from his many friends. An obituary will appear in *Scottish Birds*.

Gerard Sandeman

The death of Gerry Sandeman, a founder member of the SOC, occurred in November 1999. Our condolences go to Peggy and the family. A full obituary will appear in the Summer 2000 *Scottish Birds*.

Thanks

Once again may we thank the many volunteers who give assistance in the office, and also to those who came in to pack and send out the September mailing. If you would like to assist with this task please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on 0131 556 6042 for details.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at:
21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:- **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

1998 Dumfries and Galloway Bird Report is now available from **Joan Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Castle Douglas.** Price £2.90 including post and packing.

1998 Lothian Bird Report is now available from **David Kelly, 149 High Street, Prestonpans, East Lothian EH32 9AX.** Price £7.50 including post and packing. David's correct Email address is **d-kelly@lineone.net**

Lateness of these publications

Due to increased professional work for your Editor, Stan da Prato, and the extra workload of your Secretary, work on the publications has necessarily fallen behind schedule. At time of writing it is hoped to distribute before Christmas but if printing is delayed distribution will be in the week beginning 10 January 2000.

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BIRD

Scottish Bird News

No 57 March 2000

SMITHSONIAN
MAY 31 2000
LIBRARIES

Publications and progress

The whole point of this magazine is to publish information and ideas about Scotland's birds and not printing methods and costs. This issue has been a particularly difficult one to edit due to the large amount of material, especially on conservation issues. Several interesting items have had to be held over despite a 20 page issue. At the same time several changes and developments in our publications require some further explanation.

The good old days?

Some members will remember the days when the club had the one publication, *Scottish Birds*. It covered everything from important papers through bird reports and recording to rarity descriptions and club activities. When reviewing what we do now it is worth having a look at *Scottish Birds* prior to 1986 when *Scottish Bird News* was introduced and the *Scottish Bird Report* became a separate publication. The good old days were just that in the sense that the club has always had companionship and an informal atmosphere as one of its strengths but by the standards of the 1980s the SOC was well behind the times.

However the old *Scottish Birds* had one distinct advantage; it was typeset by the printer. Nowadays we have a greatly expanded range of publications which, to save money, are put together in house by desktop publishing. All we pay the printer for is scanning in the pictures and running off the magazines. Improvements in printing now mean that developments that we could not entertain due to our small print run of 2,700 copies, such as colour, can now be introduced. At the same time we have to face the reality that we have no significant income from advertising or sponsorship from public funds. Also, our publications are produced by too few volunteers and in ways which currently place too great a workload on the SOC's one member of staff.

Our current publications and what they need to sustain and develop them are:

The new web site

The newest is mentioned first because Ian Andrews has demonstrated how much a volunteer can achieve even within the club's modest resources. If you haven't visited it yet, perhaps because you have no Internet facility, try to persuade someone to show you. The site advertises the SOC and its activities as well as providing up dated information on recent sightings, where to watch birds in Scotland etc. It has happened through Ian's hard work and expertise coupled with important contributions from Angus Murray of Birdline Scotland. *The web site needs contributions as outlined by Ian on page 2.*

Fair Isle Wren *Tim Loseby*
This wren, of the subspecies fridariensis, was photographed on Fair Isle by Tim Loseby, and featured in his superbly illustrated talk 'Fair Isle and its birds' given to the northern branches in March. SBRC is currently compiling a list of subspecies occurring in Scotland, which is now in draft form. The Fair Isle Wren is one of our 4 island forms, and is arguably one of Scotland's rarest birds.

Scottish Bird News

This magazine has also benefited from Ian's input and reductions in printing costs that now allow us to print some pages in colour. Feedback from members suggests that variety is appreciated with a mix of 'heavyweight' conservation issues through to activities of branches and members. Please remember we can only print what people send us or bring to our attention.

SBN needs an editor or, better still, a team who can word process material, which at present has to be typed in by Sylvia, as well as locate the many interesting things happening in Scottish ornithology which are talked about at conferences, club meetings etc.

Scottish Bird Report

Ray Murray has devoted a tremendous input of time to this; word processing alone must take up hours of his time. He hopes to continue developing *SBR* with more short articles and summary tables given the amount of material available and the impact of the local bird reports which did not exist when the *SBR* was started. The aim is to publish *SBR* in June rather than September.

To effect these changes some assistance is still needed wtih the compilation of the species texts. Anyone prepared to handle short sections of the report eg 4-6pages would be welcomed. Photographs of birds taken during the year in question would also be welcomed - not only of rarities but also of commoner species.

Scottish Birds

The Club's journal is published twice per year with an emphasis on the numbers and distribution of Scotland's birds and the factors that influence these. The current editor's policy is outlined inside the back cover of the latest issue, an 'amateur friendly' refereed journal which only publishes original material.

What Scottish Birds needs is an editor, preferably an amateur or sympathetic professional, who is in touch with current fieldwork in Scotland and who regularly publishes in other journals. As with SBN it would help if the SB editor were computer literate.

Raptor Round Up

This annual publication grew out of a regular series in *SBN* in response to fieldworkers' requests. *It now needs to secure financial funding for the futur, and assistance in producing the report.*

Remuneration

Currently there is provision for honoraria for the editors of *SBN*, *SB* and *SBR*; some do not claim these modest amounts. We try to recognise the help given by others through book tokens or the occasional free conference.

There is certainly no danger of anyone becoming rich doing things for the SOC – but there is a danger that the range of publications cannot be maintained and modernised without more input from among the membership.

Changes to *SBN*

Members will notice that we have introduced colour to this issue and have altered the front and back pages to incorporate the new logo and design.

Stan da Prato

Web site update

Since its launch in December, the SOC web site has already undergone several changes. It is my aim to regularly update and expand the web site's content and to draw attention to these changes in *SBN*.

Branches

All branches have been invited to contribute material. Some branches are looking into ways of making their newsletters available through the site, and other branch contributions are welcomed; see also Where to birdwatch, below.

The Waterston Library

A full list of duplicate books and journals currently offered for sale is now available on line.

Recent bird sightings and photos

A major contribution to the site is a weekly updated page of bird news written by Angus Murray of *Birdline Scotland*. The most up to date page is now only available to members by using the password given on the back page of this *SBN*. Members are invited to phone in their bird news to Birdline on ***01292-611994***. Angus can also now be e-mailed on ***angus@birdline.fsnet.co.uk.*** Members are also invited to submit their photographs for inclusion on the web site and in *SBN*.

BIRDLINE SCOTLAND
In cooperation with the SOC
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Please phone any news into the 24 hour hotline:
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Where to birdwatch in Scotland

This popular section is expanding rapidly. A number of articles are now on line - some have been taken from recent *SBN* articles, whilst others have been made available by *Birding Scotland* magazine. Other site guides are being prepared through branches or have already been offered.

Finally, a simple word search facility has been added to the A-Z Index page. This produces a 'search engine' type list of all the pages on the site containing a particular word.

The feedback about the web site has been overwhelmingly favourable and I would like thank everyone who has contributed material and comments. However, its future success relies on regular contributions and updates, so if you would like to offer some material, please contact me to discuss the easiest way to submit it.

News and updated items are always welcomed, and it is worth remembering that the web site is an ideal place to cheaply publish club, branch or even an individual's work - whether it be a news item, survey write up, local report or photograph. Members with Internet skills may also like to help so that we can tackle more ambitions projects in the future.

Ian Andrews, web site co-ordinator
e-mail: ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk

The environment in politics

The third national conference of *Scottish Environment Link* was held in Edinburgh last month. The SOC is a member of Scottish Environment Link with Frank Hamilton as our representative. Seven months into the new Parliament, time and place were appropriate for a day grappling with the topic of The Environment in Politics. A 13 page report is in the library, space does not permit us to print a summary in this issue but we shall try to do so later. The report is available from LINK free, on receipt of a stamped (40p) addressed A4 envelope, or electronically. Please contact:

Scottish Environment LINK, 2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BD. Tel. 01738 630804, Fax 01738 643290; Email: Website:

Scotland loses out on green money compared to rest of UK and Europe

Recent research by RSPB Scotland shows how badly disadvantaged farmers and crofters in Scotland are compared to those in the rest of the UK and Europe due to the low availability of funding for environmental programmes. Not only is Scotland's agri environment budget much lower per hectare of agricultural land than offered elsewhere in the UK but the Scottish Executive also limits the amount payable per farm or croft. Such limits are not found in other parts of the UK. The budget for the UK as a whole is dismal compared to the support for these environment programmes elsewhere in Europe. Ireland, for example, has a pro rata budget nearly 4 times larger than the UK. Over 40,000 farmers in Ireland, nearly one third of the total, enjoy environment funding compared to only 6,000 farmers and crofters in Scotland.

Corncrakes and Water Rail in Caithness and Sutherland

At least 8 Corncrakes were recorded calling in the Durness area and as many as 12 in Caithness, the highest number recorded for years. Following local media coverage, many people reported calling Corncrakes to the RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage. Pat Thompson, RSPB Scotland Conservation Officer for Caithness and Sutherland, was delighted with the response from crofters, farmers and the general public. In 1999 4 crofter/farmers received just under £1,000 each in support payments through the Corncrake Initiative. Elsewhere in Scotland, Corncrake numbers were slightly up on 1998 with an estimated 566 calling birds in Scotland. The latest information about Corncrakes is available in a colour booklet from ***Scottish Natural Heritage, Publications, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth, PH1 3EW***, price £3.95.

RSPB survey work also confirmed that Caithness is important for one of Scotland's rarest breeding birds, the Water Rail, a minimum of 12 being recorded on a single evening at a total of 3 wetland sites.

Birds as indicators of the quality of life

This summary article is based on the *State of the UK's Birds – 1999.* The first in a series of annual reports summarising the fortunes of bird populations in the UK, it covers all species but in its first year focuses on breeding birds of greatest conservation concern and others which are well monitored.

Wherever possible, population trends are for the whole of the UK and cover the period 1970-99. The report begins with the UK Government's *Quality of Life* bird indicator published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. This provides a measure of the health of the environment by summarising trends in the numbers of common breeding birds. It then considers the species which are priorities in the UK Government's *Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Quality of life

In May 1999 the Government published the White Paper *A Better Quality of Life* which contains 150 indicators of the sustainability of lifestyles in the UK. Within these is a set of 14 annually updated 'headline' indicators, including a wildlife indicator based on population trends of breeding birds. These and other indicators are also being considered by the devolved executives in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The publication of a wildlife indicator among more familiar economic and social indicators shows that the Government has recognised the importance of biodiversity. Birds have been chosen partly because the data are so good, but also because their widespread distribution across the UK allows them to be used as barometers of change in the wider environment. Birds also have a wide appeal and, through expenditure associated with birdwatching, can contribute substantially to local economies.

The wild bird indicator summarises information on the status of nearly 140 breeding species over the last 30 years. The data come from a range of sources, notably the Common Bird Census. Although the index for all common birds rose slightly up to the mid 1970s, during which time resident birds recovered from the cold winters of the early 1960s, the pattern from then on is a shallow decline. The common bird index has fallen by around 7% from the mid 1970s to 1998. Looking in more detail, some woodland birds show a slow but steady drop in numbers since the mid 1970s and farmland birds have been in steep decline over the same period. There is growing acceptance that the declines among farmland birds have been driven by agricultural intensification.

Biodiversity Action Plan species

In its Biodiversity Action Plan, the UK Government has included 25 species of breeding birds which are either globally threatened or which have declined by more than 50% in the last 25 years. The population trends for 10 widespread BAP species all show steady and alarming declines, mostly starting in the mid 1970s. Declines coincided with a period of rapid intensification in farming, with increases in the use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, removal of hedgerows and changes in the timing and methods of cultivation. Although differing in detail, the BAP targets for these species all require a halt in downward trends. Unless there are dramatic changes it is unlikely that targets will be met for any of these species.

A 30 year study of Grey Partridges has shown that the indirect effects of pesticides on chicks food have been one of the major causes of their decline. A UK wide survey of Skylarks in 1997 estimated there to be about one million pairs left, down from 2 million in 1990, 50% of which were on arable land, where they nest in crops with short and sparse vegetation. The switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals means that, by the end of May, crops are unsuitable for nesting, reducing the number of chicks produced in a season.

Chick production, probably due to lack of food, also appears to be a problem for Song Thrushes which make fewer nesting attempts in arable areas where the population is declining than in more mixed farmland. Once they leave the nest, fledglings are now less likely to survive to adulthood than they were a few decades ago, again probably due to food shortages. Spotted Flycatchers are closely associated with woodlands and their decline points to a growing problem for birds in this habitat. Tree Sparrows depend on nest holes in trees and may have been affected by hedgerow loss and Dutch Elm Disease, as well as reduced summer and winter food caused by changes in agriculture.

Linnets may have been particularly affected by herbicides which have destroyed the weeds on which they once fed their young, though increased cultivation of Rape may have temporarily compensated for this loss. Shortages of food resulting from the use of pesticides reduces the productivity of Corn Buntings and may be a key factor in their continuing down turn. Reed Buntings are suffering from lower survival in their first year of life, probably because of a lack of food in winter. Bullfinches depend on woodland and well developed hedges for nesting and feeding, and may have been affected by loss and degradation of hedges and tall scrubs.

In general farmland birds have been affected by the loss of winter food, particularly weed seeds and spilt grain, the loss of stubbles and

Bullfinches feeding young *Brian Turner* overwinter fallows as a result of autumn sowing and the general tidying up of farmland. Where stubbles and other weedy habitats have been allowed to persist eg through set aside, winter flocks of birds soon demonstrate their importance.

Rare species

There is no doubt that the Common Scoter has declined since 1970, mainly due to the loss of the breeding population in Northern Ireland. The remaining population in Scotland seems to be stable and, with 95 pairs in 1995 when last fully surveyed, it remains vulnerable to deteriorating water quality caused by land use changes. Shetland is the stronghold for Red-necked Phalaropes with 21 breeding males in 1999 and remains so only as result of current management work on nature reserves. The Corncrake was found throughout the UK in the 19th century but by 1993 there were only 489 singing males, mainly in the Hebrides. The decline was caused by mechanisation and earlier dates of mowing of hay and silage, and by the loss of suitable cover in spring and autumn. The population in 1999 was estimated at 620 males a 27% increase since 1993. This upturn results from schemes that promote Corncrake friendly mowing methods, the establishment of suitable habitat on farms and crofts, and the acquisition and management of reserves. The Corncrake is a success story and has already surpassed its BAP target.

The steep decline in Roseate Terns (61 pairs in 1999) has been partially offset by increases at the flourishing colony on Rockabill Island in the Irish Republic. Breeding now occurs at only a handful of UK sites, including the Firth of Forth, where numbers are small and well below the BAP target. Recovery is probably dependent on what happens at Rockabill.

The rapidly deteriorating status of Capercaillie and Black Grouse is extremely worrying. Over 5 or 6 years Capercaillies have declined by more than 50% to 1070 adults in 1998-99 and Black Grouse by about 75% to 6,500 males in 1995-96. A series of wet summers, compounded by Fox and Crow predation, has reduced breeding success, but the main reason for decline is habitat loss and deterioration, particularly through overgrazing of their woodland and marginal upland habitats. Collision with deer fences poses a further threat. The BAP target for the Black Grouse is to maintain its population at the 1996 level and this could be achieved if appropriate management is employed on a large scale. The future of the Capercaillie, which was introduced back to Scotland in the 19th century following its extinction in the 18th, looks bleak. The pace of its recent decline means that the BAP target of 20,000 adults by 2010 is simply unrealistic – halting the decline will be a major challenge.

Nesting Sandwich Terns *Sandy Tewnion*

UK populations trends of widespread and common birds

	Trend 1970-98	Reliability	Red List candidates
Redpoll	-92	3	X
Tree Sparrow^{BAP}	-87		
Corn Bunting^{BAP}	-85	2	
Grey Partridge^{BAP}	-82		
Turtle Dove^{BAP}	-77		
Snipe	-74	3	X
Grasshopper Warbler	-73	2,4	X
Woodcock	-70	3	X
Marsh Tit	-69		X
Spotted Flycatcher^{BAP}	-68		
Willow Tit	-63		X
Tree Pipit	-62	3	X
Redshank	-60	3	X
Starling	-58		X
House Sparrow	-58	1,5	X
Song Thrush^{BAP}	-55		
Lapwing	-52	3	X
Skylark^{BAP}	-52		
Reed Bunting^{BAP}	-52		
Sedge Warbler	-45	3	
Yellowhammer	-43		
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	-42	2,3	
Bullfinch^{BAP}	-40		
Grey Wagtail	-39	3	
Linnet^{BAP}	-38		
Tawny Owl	-30	3	
Blackbird	-29		
Curlew	-28	3	
Moorhen	-26		
Willow Warbler	-23		
Dunnock	-21		
Mistle Thrush	-21		
Meadow Pipit	-20	3	
Kestrel	-17		
Swallow	-16		
Common Sandpiper	-14		
Yellow Wagtail	-13	2	
Cuckoo	-12		
Red-legged Partridge	-6		
Dipper	-6		
Jay	-4		
Treecreeper	-2		
Greenfinch	-2		
House Martin	-1		

Goldcrest	0	4
Goldfinch	10	
Coot	17	3
Little Owl	17	3
Lesser Whitethroat	17	
Kingfisher	20	
Chiffchaff	26	
Redstart	30	1,3
Chaffinch	30	
Whitethroat	34	
Garden Warbler	35	
Blue Tit	35	
Pied Wagtail	39	3
Robin	42	
Coal Tit	55	
Great Tit	57	
Long-tailed Tit	61	4
Pheasant	65	
Wren	69	4
Mallard	82	
Green Woodpecker	92	
Magpie	113	
Nuthatch	118	
Carrion Crow	120	
Stock Dove	140	
Jackdaw	148	
Blackcap	155	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	161	
Sparrowhawk	162	3
Reed Warbler	194	1
Woodpigeon	201	1
Buzzard	224	1,3
Collared Dove	782	

Trend: Percentage population change over the 29 years 1970-98 from the BTO Common Bird Census or Waterways Bird Survey.
Reliability: 1) Small sample size in early years of the period, 2) Small sample size in the later year of the period, 3) Trends may not be representative of the whole of the UK, 4) The species shows very large natural fluctuations from year to year. 5) House Sparrow monitoring began in 1975.

A survey of Choughs in Scotland in 1998 located up to 66 breeding pairs, plus at least 52 non breeding birds. Islay held 49 breeding pairs, with 14 on Colonsay and Oronsay, and single pairs on Jura, Mull and the Mull of Galloway. Numbers of breeding pairs have declined by 37% in Scotland and by 48% on Islay since 1986. This decline, together with losses from the population in Wales and just 2 pairs in Northern Ireland, means that urgent action will be required if the Chough is not to join the Red List.

Grasshopper Warblers appear to have declined by more than 70% over recent decades, though the reliability of this data is questionable.

Trends in other species

Trends in the breeding populations of species that are not BAP listed are divided into those that are declining and those that are increasing in numbers.

Declining birds

Two familiar birds, the Starling and House Sparrow, which make extensive use of farmland in some areas, have declined by more that 50% and are candidates for red listing and BAP status, although little is known about their urban populations. Close on their heels, is the Yellowhammer, which is heading for extinction in Northern Ireland.

Some woodland birds are beginning to fall in numbers, although the causes are unknown. Marsh Tit and Willow Tit have declined by over 60%. Redpolls and Tree Pipits show similar signs of population crashes, the true extent of which is not known.

Waders

Partly because of a lack of information, no wader species are included on the priority list. Several waders are declining. Numbers of Woodcock, Snipe and Redshank have fallen by more than 50%; these trends are not necessarily representative for the overall population though numbers of Redshanks breeding on saltmarsh, which holds 45% of the population, fell by 23% during 1985-96. A survey of breeding Lapwings in England and Wales in 1987 and repeated in 1998 showed that numbers have nearly halved. Similar surveys on mainland Scotland in 1997 showed a 13% decline in only 5 years. These declines have been caused by the loss of mixed farming, and the switch from spring to autumn sowing. Lapwings are unable to nest in earlier maturing crops and the conversion of rough grazing to improved grassland also affects them.

Comparable UK wide data are not available for other widespread waders but an increasing number of local surveys are revealing declines, where land drainage, other agricultural changes and predation are implicated. For example, the machair and wet pastures of the Outer Hebrides are among the most important areas for breeding waders in western Europe. In 1983, 17,000 pairs of waders were present. Surveys in the last few years have shown 60% declines in Dunlin, Redshank and Snipe on some islands, attributed mainly to egg predation by introduced Hedgehogs.

Seabirds

Although most seabirds are thought to be doing reasonably well and will be fully censused during *Seabird 2000*, terns are becoming an increasing focus of concern. The Little Tern population of 1,700 pairs in 1998 is at a new low, having declined by nearly 40% since 1975. The Sandwich Tern has declined from its peak of 18,000 pairs in 1988 to 13,500-14,000 pairs a decade later.

Birds of prey

In marked contrast to most other birds of prey, and despite there being plenty of suitable habitat, the population of Hen Harriers has failed to increase with 534 pairs in 1988-89 and 521 in 1998. Numbers continue to be depressed in moorland areas due to the illegal persecution associated with management for grouse shooting. The Barn Owl is thought to have experienced a dramatic decline from more than 12,000 pairs in the 1930s to around 4,500 pairs in the 1980s, resulting from changes in agriculture reducing food supplies and nesting opportunities.

Increasing birds

A total of 19 common and widespread species have more than doubled in numbers in recent times. Large increases in the numbers of breeding Mallards and Pheasants may be due to releases by wildfowlers and gamekeepers rather than a natural increase, although Mallard numbers are falling in winter. Buzzard numbers have increased, probably due to reduced persecution. Sparrowhawk populations have recovered strongly from pesticide effects during the 1960s, although there are signs of a recent downturn.

Willow Warblers appear to have recovered from a sharp decline in the 1980s. Increases in Wrens and Long-tailed Tits are largely the result of recovery from severe winters in the 1960s. Both are prone to wide fluctuations from year to year, driven by cold weather. Other species that have increased by more than 50% since 1970 include Great Spotted and Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Blackcap, Great Tit and Coal Tit. Climate change may account for northward expansion for the woodpeckers, Nuthatch and Blackcap and reduced persecution and habitat changes may have favoured the crows. The expansion of garden feeding may well be a factor for some species, boosting their survival at critical times of the year.

Raptors

The rising trends of 5 species of raptors, red listed because of historical declines brought about by human persecution, are a real success story. Marsh Harriers, 147 pairs in 1997, and Osprey, 130 pairs in 1998, have both recolonised the UK as a result of nest protection on and off nature reserves. The growth in the Red Kite population was boosted by successful introductions in England and Scotland, with 295 pairs in the UK in 1999. The slow but steady increase in White-tailed Eagles to 18 pairs in 1999 is the result of a programme in Scotland, backed up by nest protection to combat egg collectors. Merlin numbers appear to have more than doubled from 600 pairs in 1983-84 to 1,300 in 1993-94, partly because of increased survey effort, but more importantly because of continued recovery from pesticide contamination in the 1960s and 1970s, and their increased use of conifer plantations as nesting sites.

Winners and losers

These figures demonstrate the plight of some common farmland and woodland birds but it is obvious that many common birds must be doing rather well for the overall index to be declining only slowly. Indeed, trends among common birds which do not depend on farms or woods are generally upwards. Populations of some rare species have on average more than doubled in size since 1970, with Black-necked Grebes, Marsh Harriers, Avocets and Golden Orioles, to name but a few, all having increased markedly.

Number of breeding species

The number of breeding species in the UK is increasing, with nearly 40 more species breeding at the end of the 20th century than at the beginning of the 19th. One third of these species were introduced by people, but the remaining increase results from natural colonisation. In the last 30 years there has been a net increase of 4 species per decade. Goldeneye, Purple Sandpiper and Cetti's Warbler have all colonised since 1970 and Little Egret as recently as 1996. The reasons for the increases are unclear, but the greater number of birdwatchers searching for birds, the better protection of nests from egg collectors and climate change are all likely to have contributed.

Green Woodpecker *Bobby Smith*

Some conclusions

Although the state of the UK's breeding bird populations is by no means all doom and gloom, overall progress towards achieving the BAP targets, one of the measures of the Government's success in fulfilling its biodiversity obligations, is not satisfactory. Less than 25% of the BAP species are likely to meet their short or medium term targets. To date, major bird conservation successes all involve rare or scarce species.

Much of this success is a consequence of conservation effort. At the end of the 20th century bird conservation has demonstrated that action targeted at rare species can be extremely successful. It remains to be seen whether equal success can be achieved for other priority species such as Bittern, Capercaillie and Black Grouse.

A copy of the RSPB, BTO report State of the UK's Birds - 1999 is in the Waterston Library.

National Goose Forum Report

The objective of the National Goose Forum was to propose a new national policy framework to mange the interaction between Scotland's goose populations and agricultural interests. After 2 years work and some controversy, when RSPB and WWT were expelled following a 'breach of confidence' associated with the Judicial Review at the issuing of licences to shoot Barnacle Geese on SPAs on Islay in 1999 (a case taken by RSPB and WWT), the report was published in late February. The Scottish Executive has to consider the recommendations in the report and how these might be implemented. Before coming to the decisions on how the National Policy Framework should be taken forward they say they would like to hear the views of the wider public on what is proposed. Arrangements have also been made to make all Goose Forum papers and minutes of all meetings available on the Scottish Executive website at **http:/www.scotland.gov.uk.**

The aim is to have a policy framework in place for the winter of 2000/01. This means any member wishing to submit their views should do so by 10 April 2000. During this period, the report is to be considered by the relevant committees of the Scottish Parliament.

Background

Wild geese are an important part of Scotland's natural heritage. The wildlife spectacle that they provide is valued by many of us. However, in recent decades the numbers of some species have been increasing, and for this and other reasons damage to agricultural crops occurs in certain areas of Scotland. Most farmers affected by large numbers of geese regard them as pests.

Success story

Although some farmers are adversely affected by increasing numbers, there can be beneficial consequences for tourism, especially in rural communities, where wildfowlers and birdwatchers bring benefits to the local economy. Benefits, however, often do not go to the affected farmers.

A more flexible approach is desirable, including sustainable farming supporting a range of wildlife, sustainable harvesting of goose populations where scientific evidence supports this and a balance between geese and other wildlife interests. Current legislation is at times seen as an obstacle to such an approach.

Summary of recommendations

A copy of the recommendations can be sent out to members on receipt of an A4 size stamped addressed envelope. A copy of the Policy Report and Recommendations of the National Goose Forum, published by the Scottish Executive, is in the Waterston Library.

Results from Constant Effort Site monitoring in Fife and Lothian

This report covers the 1999 breeding season, drawing on the results of ringing at Constant Effort Sites (CES) spread throughout Fife and also Alan Hilton's West Lothian site. Constant Effort Sites operate to strict rules to ensure standardisation of catching effort between years by regulating the timing, amount of netting and length of each visit to the designated site. This standardisation of effort allows meaningful comparison of data between years and between sites.

Five CES sites provided data for this analysis. The southernmost was near Edinburgh Airport (Alan Hilton) in Lothian. This is a long running scrubland site. The next site is at Rosyth (Derek Robertson) and is a mixed wet scrub and reedbed site. Kippo (Jim Cobb) and West Quarry Braes (Chris Broome) are in the East Neuk of Fife. The former is a highly productive mixed habitat; the latter is a very recently established area of scrub in an exposed site that produces very few birds. The most northerly site is Morton Lochs (Shirley Millar and Les Hatton) near Tayport. This is a site dominated by Willow scrub and encroaching Gorse, with a relatively poor avifauna. Data from additional CES sites throughout Scotland and one site near Carlisle were also made available for comparative purposes.

Results

Table 1 lists the total combined catch of both juveniles and adults at the 5 CES sites. Data for 1997-1999 are presented, and the percentage change between 1998 and 1999 for each species is given. It should be noted that, despite combination of the 5 CES data sets, some birds occurred at such low densities that statistical analysis is extremely difficult. In addition, small sample sizes need to be borne in mind when looking at apparently massive percentage changes. For example adult Chiffchaffs declined by 500%, which actually means we only caught one adult in 1999, compared to 6 in 1998!

For juvenile captures only 4 species showed a decline in numbers, and 20 increased in comparison to 1998. There were notable increases in resident insectivores such as Wren, Robin and Song Thrush. After the appalling 1998 breeding season, there was a modest recovery in the number of young titmice produced, although this was not shared by Long-tailed Tit. One species which appears to have done particularly well during 1999, with statistically significant increases in juvenile numbers, is the Goldcrest. The 2 warbler species which are caught in reasonable numbers on the combined CES sites, Sedge Warbler and Willow Warbler, demonstrated differing fortunes. Willow Warbler juvenile numbers and, to a lesser extent, adults, showed a strongly downward trend of over 50% Sedge Warblers appear to have had a good adult return rate and a modest increase in juveniles.

The caveat concerning small sample sizes is repeated for the finches and buntings, with

Male Redpoll feeding female on the nest *Brian Turner*

Table 1: Combined totals and % change at 5 CES sites in Fife and Lothian

	Juvenile			%Change	Adult			%Change
	1997	1998	1999	1998/99	1997	1998	1999	1998/99
Wren	86	66	104	36.5	40	41	55	25.5
Dunnock	53	29	64	54.7	46	46	82	43.9
Robin	119	97	132	26.5	31	33	33	0.0
Blackbird	40	47	50	6.0	58	44	70	37.1
Song Thrush	22	12	26	53.8	16	39	36	-8.3
Sedge Warbler	60	19	22	13.6	55	27	52	48.1
Whitethroat	28	17	14	-21.4	23	15	13	-15.4
Garden Warbler	10	5	5	0.0	9	7	9	22.2
Blackcap	30	14	20	30.0	8	11	11	0.0
Chiffchaff	4	6	3	-100.0	0	6	1	-500.0
Willow Warbler	499	374	242	-54.5	223	260	217	-19.8
Goldcrest	95	45	195	76.9	13	7	12	41.7
Long-tailed Tit	38	19	18	-5.6	24	4	4	0.0
Coal Tit	59	22	31	29.0	18	14	6	-133.3
Blue Tit	195	29	47	38.3	50	35	24	-45.8
Great Tit	56	16	21	23.8	30	27	11	-145.5
Treecreeper	17	4	8	50.0	6	4	4	0.0
Chaffinch	52	9	24	62.5	66	59	45	-31.1
Greenfinch	8	1	1	0.0	11	4	4	0.0
Goldfinch	3	2	2	0.0	13	3	11	72.7
Redpoll	14	1	8	87.5	15	4	7	42.9
Bullfinch	35	16	31	48.4	37	27	33	18.2
Yellowhammer	3	4	0	-	10	8	7	-14.3
Reed Bunting	1	2	3	33.3	15	11	16	31.3

only Chaffinch and Bullfinch being caught in any quantity. Both these species showed good juvenile recruitment, although again such comparative increases reflect just how poor the 1998 breeding season was. The apparently large percentage gains for the increasingly scarce Redpoll are derived from a difference between catching one juvenile in 1998, as compared to 8 in 1999! Worryingly, no young Yellowhammers were caught at all.

Adults

Only 10 species recorded an increase in adult numbers, with Wren, Dunnock and Blackbird, together with the finches and Reed Bunting doing well. Whitethroats continued their decline. While good numbers of Sedge Warblers arrived back to breed, Chiffchaff declined, although sample sizes were very small. Fewer adult Willow Warblers were caught, but it was adult titmice that showed the poorest recruitment rates. Amongst the finches and buntings most species showed an increase in adult birds, particularly Goldfinch and Redpoll. Yellowhammer is a cause for concern, becoming increasingly scarce on the CES plots.

Some thoughts

1999 was a generally warm and wet year, and provided considerably improved breeding conditions. It is likely that such conditions played a major part in the general improvement in juvenile production for most of the 24 species covered by the CES.

While it is gratifying to see an increase in juvenile production for 20 of the 24 species some of these increases look less convincing when set against the 1997 totals, particularly for some species of warbler, titmice and finches. The impact of 1998 was to seriously depress populations of titmice, and this led to poor recruitment into the potential breeding population, possibly coupled with poor overwinter survival. Those titmice that did survive to breed in 1999 appear to have had good productivity, but the overall reduction of the breeding population to such a low base means that juvenile Blue Tit numbers in 1999 were only 24% of the 1997 juvenile totals.

It is interesting to contrast this with the rapid rebound of resident insectivores such as Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird and Song Thrush, *some may be short distance migrants Ed*. The mild winters have clearly helped these species. For most of these species both adult and juvenile numbers exceeded the 1997 totals.

The massive increase in Goldcrest numbers may be linked to an abundance of prey in conifers. Sedge Warbler adult numbers appear to have returned to their 1997 level, suggesting better survival. The modest increase in juvenile production is still considerably down on 1997, suggesting the wet spring and summer were not so helpful for this species. Wet spring and summer weather may have affected Willow Warblers which nest on the ground. Jim Cobb has suggested that declines in juveniles were due almost entirely to poor cohorts of birds moving through from further north. As 1999 results for Highland CES sites suggest lower numbers of adults returning, but increased numbers of juveniles being produced, it may be that more birds opted to migrate along the west coast. It is interesting to note that CES sites based on the Solway and Clyde reported increases in juvenile captures of 104% and 118% respectively.

Sedge Warbler feeding young *Jim Young*

It would be useful to gain a better understanding of the proportion of juvenile Willow Warblers produced on sites relative to the proportion passing through. To this end Jim Cobb has proposed that contributors differentiate between juvenile Willow Warblers caught before and after 21st July (26th July in Highland).

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all those who contributed CES data, not only from the Fife and Lothian sites, but also from the other Scottish CES sites including Mains of Auchenfranco (Ken Bruce, North Solway Ringing Group), St Abbs (Alan Kerr), Carlisle (Rob Shaw), Loch Eye & Strathrory Glen (Bob Swann & David Grieve of Highland Ringing Group) and North Haugh (Iain Livingstone, Clyde Ringing Group). Particular thanks are due to Jim Cobb for collating all the data.

Les Hatton and Shirley Millar

Scottish Black Grouse

The south Scotland Black Grouse newsletter has expanded to cover the whole of Scotland. It is an open forum for everyone who has an interest in Black Grouse and their conservation. If any readers would like a copy of this issue which is summarised here they should contact the Glasgow Office of RSPB Scotland.

Fences and Black Grouse

It is becoming increasingly clear that fence strikes are a significant cause of mortality in some Black Grouse populations. Surveys in the northeast Highlands showed that for every 10km of deer fences in native Pinewood, an average of 3-4 Black Grouse, and 17-30 Capercaillie are killed through collisions each year. Within and around plantation woodland the average figure is 1-2 Black Grouse and 0.7 Capercaillie. The only long term way to make deer fences unnecessary is to reduce deer populations to a level at which grazing does not prevent the establishment of young trees. This has been RSPB Scotland's approach at Abernethy. However, in the short and medium term RSPB Scotland recommends that fences should:

- Not run through forest (though in certain closed canopy plantations a deer fence would be better in the forest than outside it).
- Avoid feeding areas
- Avoid lek sites
- Avoid flight lines
- Be marked to make them more visible
- Be removed after young trees became established (usually 15-20 years)

Marking methods

Even appropriately marked fences still kill Black Grouse and Capercaillie. In an experiment, deer fences were marked with 25cm wide strips of orange plastic barrier netting. The average collision rate for Black Grouse was reduced by 91% and for Capercaillie by 64%. However, some have concerns over the unsightly impact of orange barrier netting. It is possible that other methods, such as using wooden fences of fitting wooden 'droppers' onto wire fences, marking with black plastic barrier netting or using horizontal, leaning or inverted L-shaped fences might be as effective as orange plastic barrier netting. A range of designs are being tested thanks to FC Challenge funding at the Abernethy Forest Reserve, on a fence that runs between 2 lek sites. In 16 months, however, no collisions were recorded from the experimentally marked section.

Black Grouse numbers in Lothian and Borders

The Black Grouse population of Lothian and Borders was recently estimated at over 500 lekking males, making this part of Scotland a region of very high importance for the species. Monitoring of lekking males at 23 key sites in the region was started in1998. The total number of males at these sites was 86 in 1998 but only 55 in 1999. Average lek size decreased between the 2 years from 3.7 in 1998 to 2.4 in 1999. Whether this is part of a long term local decline at these sites of just an annual fluctuation, caused perhaps by poor weather in spring 1998 is as yet unknown. Monitoring will continue and be expanded to include more sites, and volunteers willing to assist with counts would be welcome.

Tayside Black Grouse recovery project

This project monitors a series of sites, where different factors known to influence Black Grouse are investigated. Despite a poor breeding season in 1998, numbers of leks in the region in Spring 1999 were similar to the previous year. Breeding success on the 16 sites monitored in 1999 was 2.9 chicks per hen, which is high compared to results from elsewhere.

Black Grouse in and around Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park in 1999

The population in and around the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park was estimated as 60-70 males in the late 1990s. In April and May 1999 sites where Black Grouse had been reported between 1996 and 1998 were visited. Much of the existing data was imprecisely located and snow prevented access to some sites, making direct comparison difficult; 16 sites were visited and only 16 birds recorded. One site held 6 males in 1996 and only 2 in 1999, and another had 14-15 males in 1996 and only 2 in 1999.

Black Grouse at Abernethy Forest Nature Reserve

Black Grouse have been monitored at Abernethy since 1989 with brood and lek counts as the main indicators. Large scale reduction in grazing pressures also began at this time, although it was not until 1992-93 that deer reduction, sheep removal, plantation restructuring and fence removal began to have a significant effect on the habitat. The numbers of lekking cocks rose from 49 in 1991 to 190 in 1997. Over the past 10 years or so, some 30km of internal deer fence and 14km of stock fence have been removed from the forest. In addition, 8km of deer fence has been reduced to stock fence height.

Worryingly, 1999 has been another poor year for Black Grouse breeding productivity at Abernethy. During annual brood counts conducted over a wide part of the reserve a sample of 15 greyhens gave 1.2 chicks/hen. While marginally up form 1997 and 1998 (0.7 and 1/hen) this year's productivity may again be insufficient to maintain the reserve population. From the heady heights of 190 cocks at 13 locations in 1997, numbers of cocks have fallen over the past 3 years. While this decline was anticipated due to recent poor chick recruitment, the field layer recovery phase, associated with recent grazing control, may be slowing down. Many workers are aware of the positive response to productivity when grazing pressures are alleviated and some suggest that this honeymoon response tails off after about 7 years. Another theory is that dense ground vegetation with a corresponding lack of open bare ground as a component of the habitat may reduce productivity. This is likely to be more valid during prolonged wet periods. An experiment at Abernethy is being planned over the next 5 years to test what impact developing ground vegetation has on regeneration.

Blackcock displaying *Bobby Smith*

Personal View from John Cowan, Scottish Gamekeepers Association

I would like to offer some suggestions for discussion:
Predator control should be addressed following results of a Game Conservancy Trust trial involving the radio tracking of 20 Black Grouse juveniles. Within a month 11 had been killed; 6 by Stoats and 3 by raptors. I feel that a localised tunnel trapping campaign in the vicinity of leks should be tried to see if any beneficial effects can be achieved. This should be accompanied by a reduction in Fox density and Corvid numbers if this has not already happened.

When one talks to older keepers and farmers about Blackcock they recollect visiting cornfields which adjoined the moors. Black Grouse perched on the stooks and fed on the stubbles. How important to the Black Grouse was this feeding? Could the absence of feeding explain the low fertility rates in Black Grouse due simply to lack of nutrition? If this is true some method should be found of feeding birds, especially through the late winter and early spring, to replace cornfields on marginal ground where they no longer exist.

If artiificial rearing is to be needed in future we must start now to perfect techniques in egg production, rearing and release. I would suggest that releases are made to areas which contain suitable habitat, but very few Black Grouse. The successful release of gamebirds into the wild only occurs when the released birds cannot be distinguished from true wild ones. This can be difficult to achieve and advice from gamekeepers would be useful as many teething troubles could be avoided.

I wish the Black Grouse recovery project every success. I feel success will be difficult to achieve but is possible if an open mind is kept and all avenues are explored thoroughly, and a wide variety of management and habitat improvements tried.

Scottish Black Grouse Newsletter, RSPB Scotland, South and West Scotland Office, Unit 3.1, W Scotland Science Park, Kelvin Campus,Glasgow G20 0SP.

UK Raptor Working Group Report

The background to this has been covered in several issues of *SBN*. The report was published in February. Here are its main conclusions. The working group's terms of reference were to consider the population and status of birds of prey; identify species alleged to be causing problems; identify, in particular, the impact of such species on game birds and moorland management and on racing pigeons; identify gaps in research and future needs and identify possible sources of funding; and consider statutory and other mechanisms for the resolution of problems.

A healthy brood of Hen Harriers *Sylvia Laing*

Status of birds of prey

The UK has international obligations for the conservation of its bird of prey populations: 11 of the 16 UK species are listed as UK Red Data birds. Whilst some species have recovered from earlier declines caused by killing by man, which has been completely illegal since 1954, or by the effects of pesticides, most have not yet fully recovered their former range or numbers. Two species, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel, are known to be declining nationally.

There is good information on numbers of all British raptors with monitoring in place. The intensity of bird surveys in the UK in unparalleled in the world. This enabled the group to make objective assessments of bird of prey populations and the problems attributed to them.

In the 4 years since the establishment of the working group in 1995, there have been 371 confirmed reported incidents in Britain of illegal killing of raptors. These reported incidents probably reflect only a very small proportion of the total incidents that actually occurred. There is evidence that this activity has limited both the distribution and number of Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles and Red Kites The number of incidents relative to national population size is greatest for Hen Harrier, followed by Red Kite, White-tailed Eagle and Peregrine. Hen Harriers are at risk of extinction as a breeding species in England. In both England and Scotland there is strong evidence of illegal killing on grouse moors.

The report recommends enhanced enforcement of existing legislation to eliminate illegal killing of birds of prey. Legal measures alone, however, are unlikely to solve these problems.

Birds of prey and grouse moors

A fundamental issue is the loss of nearly a quarter of all Heather moorland in Scotland in just 40 years. In the light of the importance of grouse moors for the rural economy, as well as for nature conservation and wildlife, there is a need to restore the quality and extent of Heather moorland. Over the last 50 years Scottish, but not English, grouse bags have declined. In the last 10 years, grouse densities on monitored moors have not declined in either country. Since 1950, 127 Heather moors in Scotland – 30% of the total – have ceased to be managed for sport shooting of Red Grouse. Widespread overgrazing in the uplands, especially by sheep but also by Red Deer, has had major impacts on many Heather moors. A variety of factors point to grouse moors in Scotland being less intensively managed and of lower viability than those in England.

In many areas grouse bags have shown a long term decline for much of this century for reasons unconnected with raptors. These are linked to quality and quantity of habitat and intensity of moorland management. The current low level of grouse in some areas is such as to reduce significantly the viability of driven grouse shooting on some moors. After 1990 at Langholm, Red Grouse stocks were significantly reduced by raptor predation at a time when grouse stocks were low and raptor densities were high. This affected Red Grouse bags and, subsequent to the study, spring densities at Langholm were reduced and driven grouse shooting suspended. To what extent this pattern would be repeated on other moors is not known. The fear that this would be a widespread pattern fuels much of the persistent illegal killing of birds of prey. Such concerns are a major impediment to the development of the active partnerships that are urgently need between conservationists and others living and working in the uplands.

Solutions

The group suggests that much of the long term solution to the current problems faced by grouse moor owners lies in the need to restore and enhance the extent and quality of Heather moorland. A new specific incentive scheme for Heather moorland would be ideal; however the refocusing of existing schemes to include additional elements that encourage good moorland management is a more realistic short term objective.

Diversionary feeding of birds of prey is within the law provided there is no disturbance to the birds of prey. Results of trials in Scotland, involving the feeding of Hen Harriers in 1998 and 1999 were successful and diversionary feeding is a technique that should be widely promoted as a means of reducing Hen Harrier predation on Red Grouse during critical periods. Trials of diversionary feeding of Peregrines on grouse moors should be undertaken.

The EU Wild Birds Directive allows lethal control as a legal option only in particular circumstances. In the current circumstances, where not all other satisfactory solutions to conflicts have been tried, the working group has ruled out lethal control of raptors. Conservationists, grouse moor owners and gamekeepers should realise that they share many common objectives. There are many clear signs of this common thinking developing within the Moorland Working Group in Scotland. On Heather moorland there is the potential to integrate the management of grouse with the conservation of the natural environment.

Birds of prey and racing pigeons

The Sparrowhawk and Peregrine are the 2 species that most frequently interact with racing pigeons. Goshawks also occasionally kill pigeons. Raptors sometimes kill pigeons whilst training and racing, or while exercising around lofts. Evidence of the circumstances and scale of losses to raptors has been obtained by a commissioned research project, together with surveys undertaken by the Scottish Homing Union and the Royal Pigeon Racing Association.

Losses to raptors are just one cause of the mortality of racing pigeons and pigeon fanciers accept that their sport carries a degree of risk from attacks by predators. Accordingly, data and information on the different causes of failure of pigeons to return to lofts will be important in the development of a strategy to resolve problems.

The group has concluded that there is a clear need for the development, testing and evaluation of the effectiveness of deterrents at the loft and during the training and racing of pigeons. It is clear that no single technique will solve these problems since they are caused by several species of raptor, and their intensity varies in different places and different times.

Priority should be give to understanding the causes of straying during racing, especially for young birds. Minimising straying is likely to be the single most effective way of enhancing pigeon return rates. Consideration should also be given to delaying the start of the 'old bird' racing season in order to avoid the current coincidence with the start of the Peregrine's breeding season, as well as to reorganising race routes, especially for young bird racing, in an attempt to establish 'flight corridors' and reduce the current complexity of north/south and east/west crossovers in the flightpaths of pigeons during racing.

Birds of prey and lowland gamebirds

Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Tawny Owl and Goshawk have been identified as preying on Pheasants and Partridges. However, in the context of the total number of gamebirds released, losses are minimal. There are localised problems particularly related to predation around Pheasant release pens. The group has initiated work to enable game and conservation bodies jointly to disseminate clear advice on best practice. The study will report in 2000.

Birds of prey and songbirds

It has been suggested that they recovery of some birds of prey has caused declines in formerly common farmland birds. Although the declines of many formerly common songbirds have coincided with the recovery of Sparrowhawks the working group has concluded that there is no evidence that birds of prey have affected population levels of British songbirds. These declines are a consequence of changing types of lowland agriculture (see pages 3-6 of this issue).

The issues raised by raptor predation remain contentious and will not be resolved easily. The working group considers that we need better education, a public awareness of the problems and a focus on best practice by those concerned with management of gamebirds and racing pigeons. Compatibility between conservation and game management cannot be left to evolve by default: it must continue to develop by design.

A copy of the UK Raptor Working Group Report is in the Waterston Library, and copies are available from **Fiona MacTaggart, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 0131 554 9797**. An electronic version is available in PDF format via JNCC's website, **http:/www.jncc.gov.uk**

Two healthy Peregrine chicks *Dave Dick*

Golden Eagle *Stuart Rae*

Sparrowhawk encounter

About half a mile east of Inverlochlarig in October we heard squawking coming from a bush beside the road. Stopping beside it we saw a Sparrowhawk holding a Jay in a small stream. The hawk, while itself semi submerged in the stream, was holding the Jay's head under the water with its claws as if to drown it which it eventually succeeded in doing. We were only about 2 metres away from the action, watching from the car, with the hawk looking straight at us. Once the Jay had stopped struggling, the Sparrowhawk flew off leaving its prey in the stream. About 2 hours later we returned to the site to find the Jay's feathers beside the stream. Clearly the hawk had returned to feed once we had left. We suspect this is the same Sparrowhawk that has been found at least twice recently in the Inverlochlarig hen house, terrorising sparrows.

Malcolm MacNaughton

Drowning was probably a consequence of the Sparrowhawk catching the Jay over a stream, using its standard hunting method rather than deliberately taking the prey into water. Eds.

Twenty fifth Scottish Ringers' Conference Braemar 1999

The first Scottish Ringer's Conference was a salubrious affair, opened by the Lord Provost of Perth in his full regalia, and hosting serious discussions and presentations by some of the finest minds in Scottish ornithology. It all went downhill from there.

A gatecrashed wedding; the food fight; a dead deer in the bath; those incidents with the fire extinguishers; the sword fight, with real swords; snowballs flung through the bar and onto the passing police Land Rover; an impromptu cracker eating competition and a Sea Eagle that flew over and practically perched on the hotel......the organisers of the 25th Scottish Ringers' Conference knew that anything they arranged would come as something of an anticlimax to the goings on of the previous 24 years.

As organisers of that first conference in Perth, the Tay Ringing Group also hosted the 25th conference at the Fife Arms Hotel in Braemar where the event has settled in recent years. As ever, Friday evening was a chance to catch up on acquaintances, to meet new faces and to drop in and out on the series of informal slide talks, this year featuring the life and times of various ringing groups.

The programme had been designed to mix the light and the serious, a balance that the heavier headed of us appreciated on Saturday morning when a welcome was given by Henry Robb, who had chaired part of that first conference 24 years before. The first talk by Mike Toms gave an overview of the value of Scottish ringing. The following presentation by Mick Marquiss looked back at the past 24 years and gave a view from the ringers' perspective of how times had changed and the strengths of ringing in Scotland. The 2 following talks highlighted some of these strengths: long term studies, carried out by enthusiastic volunteers. Jim Cobb described detailed research on dispersal of Willow Warblers as part of his long running studies at Kippo. Clive Walton talked with real enthusiasm about his studies of Reed Buntings, centred on his ringing site in West Lothian, but drawing on a network of other ringers in the Tay-Forth area who were colour ringing birds for his project.

Mike Steward's afternoon talk on forest design and birds portrayed the conservation and planning involved in forest management and his extensive Barn Owl ringing project. Steve Moyes followed by giving an up to date account of the birds and ringing projects carried out in the Tay Reedbeds, where rare, and interesting species now abound. A feature of this year's conference was the contribution of many Scottish Ringing Groups who contributed displays and, in the case of Grampian, entertainment on the Saturday night by presenting the second, and quite possibly last, of their infamous "Have I Got Birds For You" quiz show. Mere words cannot paint a picture of the proceedings but photographs were taken and Chris Wernham will be paying hush money for the rest of her life.

For those who survived Saturday night, the talks by Chris Wernham on dispersal of Scottish Cormorants and Alan Lauder on the Cormorants of Loch Leven were fascinating and showed the value of well researched studies on both the local and national scale. Arnur Sigfusson had travelled from Iceland to deliver an intriguing account of the management of geese in his homeland and the importance attached to the new shooting licences in continuing research and management. The following talk from Colin Sheddon, of Scottish BASC, described the situation in Scotland and the importance of collaborative research by wildfowling interests and ringers.

Closing remarks by Jeremy Greenwood for the BTO highlighted the developing nature of the Ringing Scheme in Scotland. With new training procedures and research strategies it is up to Scottish ringers to ensure that the scheme develops in ways that benefit research and conservation and takes account of the particular interests of ornithologists in Scotland. The setting up of a new BTO office in Edinburgh should help to see that this happens. Henry Robb thanked all those concerned and presented gifts to Bob Swann and Skits Rae, who had both attended all 25 conferences. The whole weekend went extremely well, partly due to the huge ammount of work put in by many members of the Tay, and other, ringing groups, but also due to the good humour and good company of those attending.

The next conference will be hosted by the Lothian Ringing Group on the 17-19. November 2000 at Braemar. Enquiries to **Mark Cubitt, 12 Burgh Mills Lane. Linlithgow. EH49 7TA.**

Copies of the group photograph below are available from the **Tay Ringing Group, c/o Derek Robertson, Woodlands, Bandrum, nr. Carnock, Fife KY12 9HR** enclosing a cheque for £5 made out to "Tay Ringing Group". Profits will go to the Scottish Raptor Study Group.

Derek Robertson

Delegates who attended the 25th Scottish Ringers' Conference at Braemar, 1999. *Stuart Rae*

Musselburgh Lagoons

The birdwatching interest of this site has been the subject of articles in *SBN 7* September 1987 by Ian Andrews and *SBN* 43 in September 1996 by David Kelly. Bob Furness described the effects of the lagoons on waders in *SB 7*:6. Since then there have been a number of improvements which were completed in December 1999. The lagoons behind the new seawall have been slowly filled in with ash from the nearby coal fired power station at Cockenzie. When the lagoons are full, they are landscaped and handed over to East Lothian Council to manage as an amenity facility. A large recreational pond is used for canoeing, boating and model yachting, while 6 shallow clay lined pools are set aside as a bird reserve. It is these pools that have been the scene of recent developments.

Towards the end of 1998 RSPB Scotland received a substantial sum of money from Scottish Power through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. This money was then used to make some major improvements to the site. Individual pipes were laid to each of the 6 pools from a main control unit that can be operated without any disturbance to the wildlife. At the same time, exit sluices were put into all the pools thus allowing total hydrological control of the site. The next stage in the project was to build 3 birdwatching hides overlooking the pools with a network of footpaths linking them to the existing car park. Due to potential problems with vandalism, these hides were constructed of brick and concrete without any roofs. The hides are partially built into the bunds surrounding the pools to reduce the visual impact of the structures on the surrounding landscape and to provide more shelter from the elements. All the hides and footpaths are fully accessible to wheelchairs and prams. To complete the project, onsite interpretation was provided with the installation of 4 large information boards, 2 in the vicinity of the pools and 2 along the adjacent seawall. An information leaflet has also been produced.

Musselburgh is one of Scotland's premier birdwatching sites. Over 220 bird species have already been recorded there, including Scotland's first Royal Tern in August 1999 and other rarities such as Western Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Forster's Tern, Bonaparte's Gull and Desert Wheatear. It is now possible to sit in relative comfort and watch the birdlife on the pools without causing any disturbance. Water levels can be carefully manipulated for the benefit of passage and breeding birds. The project has been an excellent example of a partnership involving Scottish Power, East Lothian Council and RSPB Scotland using the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme to enhance the environment.

Visitors to Levenhall Links are welcome throughout the year and the hides are open at all times. Vehicular access to the main car park on the site if off the B1348 Musselburgh to Prestonpans road about 1km east of Levenhall roundabout. Alternatively pedestrians can enter the site from either Goosegreen and the mouth of the River Esk or Morrison's Haven at Prestongrange.

Mike Trubridge

Recent developments are to be recommended. The next goal must be to secure the future of the nationally important roost site at the lagoons. Eds

A general view of the hides and lagoons at Musselburgh. *Mike Trubridge*

Charles Frank

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Branch Newsletters

Fife

Noting that the editorial assistant's abiding image of his trip to Ghana was a rubbish tip in Mole led me to consider what other recreational activity allows people to see such a wide array of municipal refuse tips, water treatment plants, sewage settling tanks and other sites of beautiful functionality, all at close quarters too. Let me recount a recent exchange in the editorial home after a recent outing:
Assistant 'Did you see the female Blackcap on the *Templewood Hawksley MKVIII sludge cutter?'*
Editor 'Surely that wasn't a *T H McVIII,* the under gantry cover plates were polished aluminium and not galvanised steel. I think it must have been a *Hesketh bog slicer 27B*, and a first winter at that because there were no signs of oxidation of the exposed metal parts and the maintenance stickers were obviously new.'
Assistant 'If that's the case that would make it a first for Scotland because the Hesketh manufacturing grounds are in Hungary and, until now, the farthest west they have been seen is the Texel Sewage Treatment Plant in the Netherlands.'

You might smirk, but we will be laughing all the way to the bank when we start to make millions with *Dean's Guide to Western Palearctic Water Treatment Equipment*. Keep a look out for Volume 1, *filter beds to maceration units*, due out next millennium.

Martin Dean

Highland pressure!

For some every day in December is one further step towards failure, another opportunity to improve oneself missed. Yes, I'm talking about listing - especially year listing. Have the hopes for 1999 been fulfilled? Have I got the longest year list of my life? Can I hit the target of 200 birds in Scotland in a year? Does anybody care? Yes, we listers do. It's a curse, no doubt, but a lister's gotta do what a lister's gotta do. Tick.

Tuesday 7 December 1999 and I'm on 199 for Scotland. The target was 200. Complacency, I blame complacency. Took my eye off the ball. Before you know it, there's hardly more than a handful of opportunities left in 1999 to get those awkward species. A man who calls himself a birder hasn't managed to clock a single Corn Bunting, White-fronted Goose, Little Auk, not a yaffle of a Green Woodie, Bean Goose? Ha, ha. Merlin - acute embarrassment factor there. Long-tailed Skua - gone. Long-eared and Barn Owl - I think not. Shrike, and shrike - I could shriek about shrikes. And for one who calls himself a seawatcher, why no petrels? This man needs help, and he needs it quickly. Greater Sand Plover, Pied Wheatear, Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, they are all very well, but no Glaucous Gull? Yes, a Longman habitue and no Glauc. I need to lie down, it's all too much. I don't think I can cope. Is there any consolation? Ah yes. On 1 January 2000 it's a whole new list!!!!!

Anon

Fair Isle and its solitary bird

There has recently been published *The Journals of Sir Randall Philip, OBE, QC*, covering the years 1947-57. In 1948 he was appointed Sheriff Principal of Renfrew and Argyll and thereby became ex *officio* a Commissioner of Northern Lights. He proved to be an assiduous participator in the legendary annual cruises with which those luminaries fulfilled their responsibilities of inspecting even the most remote Scottish lighthouses and in his *Journals* he described at length his first such cruise up the east side of Scotland in July 1949. This contains much of interest – and also at p129 one memorable *gaucherie* "Fair Isle is now a bird sanctuary owned by Mr Waterston of Edinburgh and one Nightingale has been seen on it".

Dougal Andrew

The new BTO Scottish Office

By the time you read this the SOC will have a new neighbour. The BTO are currently establishing their new Scottish Office upstairs at 21 Regent Terrace.

Why a Scottish office?

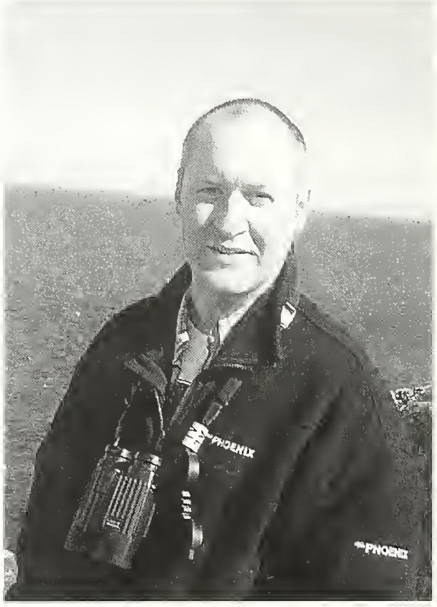
Scotland is the biggest UK country after England and the one whose natural history is most different from the rest. It hold all or most of the UK population of Sea Eagles and Corncrakes and is the key area in the UK for 23 of the 175 species listed on the EU Birds Directive. Yet to cover these important birds in an area comprising 32% of the UK, there is only 9% of the UK's human population. Most people are concentrated in a few conurbations, with vast areas scarcely populated, remote, and inaccessible.

Birdwatchers in Scotland display a level of activity that belies their relatively small numbers. Numbers of birds ringed, coverage of surveys, numbers of nest record cards - almost any measure of participation in BTO work that you care to name - are well above the 9% that one would expect on the basis of population alone. Having staff based in Scotland will be one way of encouraging greater participation by Scottish birdwatchers in both Scottish and UK wide BTO surveys. The BTO Scotland staff can also ensure that the work the Trust does is not just related to the priorities of the UK as a whole but is also focused on the priorities of Scotland, with a landscape and wildlife so different from the rest of the UK.

Staff based in Scotland, will be in a much better position to build collaborative partnerships for our work, which can mean so much in terms of bringing BTO's ornithological expertise together with that of researchers in other disciplines. And, of course, to underpin our projects we have to find funds. Funding that originates in Scotland, is likely to be easier to obtain from the office of BTO Scotland than from our HQ in England. The office will be staffed initially by a Head of BTO in Scotland and a secretary but with the intention of sustained growth over the next several years.

The SOC,is providing space in its own offices in Edinburgh. The RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust have been generous with advice. Scottish Natural Heritage has awarded a grant of £45,000 to go with £67,500 from the Esmee Fairburn Charitable Trust and £60,000 of BTO's own funds, to make up a funding package that will launch the enterprise.

The new head of BTO Scotland
Alan Lauder



Alan Lauder took up his post as Head of BTO Scotland on 28 February. A Scottish birder for more than 20 years, Alan brings a great deal of commitment and enthusiasm to the post. He comes from a 9 year stint with SNH, first as manager of Loch Leven and Rannoch Moor NNRs, then as an Area Officer in Tayside and Clackmannanshire. He is a graduate of Stirling University and prior to SNH also worked for BASC and NTS. Alan is an avid ringer, particularly of wildfowl, seabirds and passerines and has a range of both professional and personal research interests include studies of duck and goose feeding, Cormorants and fisheries and seabirds. Alan is currently studying the survival of Tufted Duck ducklings as a part time MPhil at St Andrews University.

Aggressive corvids

On 17 November 1995 I was working in Musselburgh, Lothian, I looked out of the window onto the flat roof of the building below to see 5 Crows harassing a Black-headed Gull which was spread eagled with its wing stretched out across the roof. Three of the Crows were onlookers, the other 2 being the protagonists. There appeared to be something wrong with the gull. It crouched low to the surface of the roof, keeping its bill pointed towards the nearer of the Crows. When a Crow stood behind it, the gull twisted its head round with its bill open, apparently ready to defend itself. The other Crow was able to take advantage of this diversion. Twice it picked up the wing tip nearest it and dragged the gull across the roof. The other Crow joined it on one occasion and they both dragged the bird away from the edge of the roof. The other 3 Crows stayed close to the action.

After about 3 minutes, the gull was dragged back to the edge of the roof. One of the Crows stood on the edge of an outstretched wing and pecked down hard at the bone between its feet. After 10 to 15 pecks it was disturbed when it saw me. At this point the gull attempted to fly but the Crow grabbed the tip of its wing as it took off. The gull lost its balance and fell to the grass below. All 5 Crows flew down after it. By now my colleagues wanted the gull rescued. I went down and took it in. The Crows moved away as I approached. I was told that during the time I had taken to go downstairs, the Crows had been continually attacking the gull.

An SSPCA Officer took the gull to recuperate. He could see nothing wrong with its legs or wings. He presumed that the bird was weak from hunger and the windy weather and thought that the Crows had detected this and tried to take advantage.

Peter Gossip

This sort of behaviour by Crows is quite common though not always seen so close to human observers. Eds.

LIBRARY NEWS

Librarian

At the end of December John Law, our Librarian for the past 4 years, stood down at the end of his agreed term of office. Many new ideas and innovations were introduced and the library funds have shown a healthy balance due to his vigorous pursuit of any selling opportunities. The Club and Library Committee wish to thank him for all his work and dedication during this period. We are not losing John as he joins the small band of helpers which deals with many aspects of running the library.

We welcome another John! John Davies took over as Librarian from 1 January 2000. He is Welsh by birth but has lived in Edinburgh for 37years, and considers himself effectively Scottish. He retired from the Civil Service in 1998. He started out 40 years ago programming computers, when they were very different from modern machines. In due course he moved on to other things but his background is enough to allow him to feel able to tackle putting the library card index onto a database. Once complete this will be of considerable benefit to library users.

He has been a member of the SOC for a number of years, and considers himself a fairly typical amateur bird watcher. His last 3 working years were spent at the Scottish Office in Leith, with a desk looking out over the docks. The remarkable variety of bird life seen was a major distraction at times. He has been working as a library volunteer for 18months and is looking forward to being Librarian in 'the best ornithological library in Scotland'.

David Clugston

REVIEWS

A Source Book for Biological Recording in Scotland *by A-M Smout and D Mellor. Published by BRISC. 1999. 169pp. Obtainable from BRISC, c/o Chesterhill, Shore Road, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3DZ e-mail: AMSmout@aol.com.*

This information packed book is a valuable source of reference on every aspect of biological recording in Scotland. Introductory chapters deal with the collection, processing and use of data, and emphasise the importance of data exchange. It also gives information about the exciting National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and lists the Local Record Centres and National Recording Schemes, including the SOC's Local Recorders' Network. If you are looking for any sort of biological data or wanting to know who to report any wildlife sighting to, this book should be your starting point.

Ian Andrews

A Field Guide to the Raptors of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa *by William S Clark. Oxford University Press. 1999. 371 pp. ISBN 0-19854661-0. £25.*

This compact guide fully covers all the raptors to be found in the titled areas with paintings of each including all variations and comparative plumages plus a wide selection of colour photographs. These are complemented by a generous descriptive text which includes clear large scale distribution maps. The illustrations, while good, seem sometimes too brightly coloured and fine detailed, features which in this range of species are rarely seen well in the field. The layout, however, is not ideal for a field guide with main text and pictures in 3 separate sections. Pricing for a paperback is on the high side and the guide will have to compete with the growing selection of others on the market today.

Keith MacGregor

Rothiemurchus – Nature and People on a Highland Estate 1500-2000. *T C Smout & R A Lambert (eds) Scottish Cultural Press 1999. 160pp. ISBN 1-84017-033-6 £9.99.*

This book, based on a day conference held to mark the bicentenary of *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, contains social, literary and architectural as well as natural history. Even so, there are chapters on birds and mammals, nature and sport, the woodlands and the forest ecology by Roy Dennis, R A Lambert, T C Smout and P R Ratcliffe. The price is not unreasonable and the book will appeal to most people who have ever enjoyed a visit to Rothiemurchus.

John Law

Scotland's Nature in Trust – The National Trust for Scotland and its Wildlife and Crofting Management *by J Laughton Johnston. T & A D Poyser. 1999. 266pp. ISBN 0-85661-122-0 £27.95.*

This book deals with environmental management by the National Trust for Scotland, now the second largest private landowner in Scotland, of the natural heritage at 10 of its properties north of the Highland Boundary Fault. These include Ben Lawers, Canna, Torridon, Mar Lodge Estate and Fair Isle as well as St Kilda, which is currently managed for the Trust by SNH. During 1998-99 the author visited many of the Trust's properties in the Highlands and Islands, interviewing staff and perusing Management Plans.

The opening chapter outlines some current countryside management issues. The author then describes in separate chapters each of the 10 properties, the natural heritage, conservation problems encountered and action being taken. Each chapter includes a map of the site with colour photographs and illustrations by John Busby. The final chapter gives the author's view of the future. The author points out that the Trust has only recently recognised the need for active conservation of the environment at these properties. The layout of the book allows the reader to concentrate on a particular property but the book is worth reading in its entirety, especially as most sites have interesting bird populations.

Joan Wilcox

The Great Auk *by Errol Fuller, 1999. 448 pp. ISBN 0-9533553-0-6. £45.*

This is a beautifully produced book with many illustrations about a large bird which none of us has, or will ever have, on our lifelist. It is by a man who spent 6 years researching the literature, and the known specimens. If you want a guide to what is known about the Garefowl, this is the place to look, though at 2.8kg it is easier to handle on a table than on your lap. You will find a comprehensive bibliography, and a page or 2, usually with illustration, of each known stuffed bird (78 + 2/3 destroyed) and egg (75 + 2 destroyed) - history, references and present location. In Scotland there are birds in the National Museum in Edinburgh and in Kelvingrove, but that which used to belong to the Malcolms of Poltalloch is in Cardiff and the Papa Westray bird is in Tring. Mr Fuller, naturally, has one himself, Hoppa's Auk. As to eggs, there is one in Aberdeen and 2 each in Edinburgh and Inverness, with a further 8 currently in the possession of Dr Jack Gibson. If these random bits of information have roused your curiosity then you will want to consider adding this book to your library.

John Davies

Owls: A Guide to the Owls of the World*. by C Konig, F Weick and J-H Becking. Pica Press. 1999. 464pp 64 plates, 212 species and maps. ISBN 1-873403-74-7. £35.*

The plates and species accounts form the impressive core of this book and the device of numbering each species makes cross referring between the 2 very easy; a simple device that should be utilised elsewhere. The plates feature good artwork but more flight illustrations would be useful. Some appear very crowded and others have erratic and unhelpful arrangements of species on the pages. Great emphasis is laid on vocalisations for identification but strangely the accompanying double CD covering over 80% of the world's species is only briefly mentioned in the Introduction. There are inconsistencies in some identification information, especially for similar species eg Long-eared and Short-eared Owls, with key differences scattered in different parts of the accounts. Place names for both maps and distribution text at times need more information to elucidate where in the world they are, particularly the more obscure island groups. Six errata are listed but I found a few more errors and some typos. Notwithstanding these reservations, some of which may be an inevitable result of the wealth of information compressed into a single volume, I know of no serious rival for the subject and recommend this work as indispensable for any one with a serious interest in owls.

Trevor Smith

LETTERS

Dear Brian and Sylvia

Congratulations on an improved *SBN*, the welcome return of Recent Reports, much better photographic reproduction and an excellent SOC website.

There are a few comments on *SBN* I hope to let you have soon, but there is one very easy change that would improve the flow of narrative - ie to use words rather than numerals for the numbers 1 to 12, except in lists, counts, tables, etc. I know a good few members who find the present style most irritating. I read many journals, including *New Scientist* and *British Birds*, and, as far as I can see, SOC is the only one which adopts this style.

We also need to get rid of the ridiculous rule banning the use of hyphens, which has even led to the term "seminatural" (which should NOT be hyphenated), edited in recent Club publications as 2 separate words, "semi natural", presumably due to the author mistakenly hyphenating the word in the first instance. To be fair, this error has recently been perpetuated by both SNH and RSPB in biodiversity documents. Stan's excuse that language is always evolving does not hold water on the hyphen issue, particularly as we seem to be the only ones resisting the tide!

Iain Gibson

We do use words for 'one' and for numbers when they appear at the start of sentences. Hyphens are not banned because in some cases, eg Black-headed Gull, they are essential. I know many readers would agree with Iain's points but the fact is that there is no one generally accepted convention for these and other matters that editors have to deal with, such as the ways in which references are laid out or whether to use capitals for English names etc. I know because when I became involved in editing I compared British Birds, Bird Study, Ibis etc with what Scottish Birds did then and found differences. I also found that Scottish Birds had changed its approach to some of these points over the years. I therefore went for the simplest possible system which I still think will eventually become the norm. Language and print conventions are not static. Current practice in school and college courses in typing is to use numerals, not words, for most numbers.

Canute da Prato

Dear Sir

The SOC was a major influence in fostering my interest in birds as a schoolboy, and played a big part in the development of my interest from schoolboy birdwatching to a professional career in ornithology. This seems to me to be one of the most useful functions for the SOC, and I would be very sorry to see future generations of Scottish youth unable to benefit from the encouragement and guidance previously provided by the club. Membership issues and club activities certainly need attention, and I hope that members will do something about that, but here I'm going to concentrate on my perception of the problems of the club's publications as I see those as matters that are not so difficult to resolve.

I would hope that the editors of *Scottish Birds* have a clear view of the function of that publication, but the comments in the response of *SBN* 'Eds' to Ian Stenhouse's letter in Dec 1999 *SBN* make me wonder. Having the highest acceptance rate of any ornithological journal is not a matter for boasting, but implies that the journal now receives very little material. Perhaps potential authors are being put off by recent poor standards of production. So should we scrap the journal? Definitely not. It has a very important role. One of the most important publications in bird conservation in the UK is Gibbons *et al* 1993 *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991*. This is used as a cornerstone of bird conservation policy by JNCC, SNH, RSPB etc. I counted the number of references cited in that book in different 'scientific journals' (over 70 journals were cited). These were ranked as follows: *Bird Study* (135 citations), *British Birds* (81), Ibis (63), *Scottish Birds* (28), *Ornis Scandinavica* (27), *J Animal Ecology* (25), *J Applied Ecology* (19), *Irish Birds* (17), *Biological Conservation* (14), *Journal of Zoology* (10), *Ardea* (10), *Wildfowl* (8), *BTO News* (7), *Animal Behaviour* (7), *Ringing & Migration* (5). No local bird report in the UK scored more than 3 (well done *Argyll Bird Report*). The *Scottish Bird Report* was cited only twice, this itself may be a statistic worth further discussion and *SBN* once. So *Scottish Birds* has a performance that is highly creditable on this criterion, ranking fourth of all journals. It seems to me that this clearly indicates its role. It is a journal that can document the populations and status of birds in Scotland, and the changes in these as a result of changing environmental conditions - especially such important influences as farming practice, fisheries or global climate change. SOC should promote that role for the journal, and to do so should actively encourage potential authors to contribute relevant papers, and should strive to ensure that the published journal is free of errors and production imperfections that have certainly tarnished its image in recent years.

SBN is already very good and I always enjoy reading it but I can suggest 2 ways to improve it. First, proof reading. As well as obvious typos and even incorrect banners, it comes across as less than professional when a request for butterfly records to be sent before the end of 1999 is not circulated until the month after the deadline. Secondly, there seems to be a tendency for the same folk to contribute articles to *SBN* issue after issue. I'm sure that this is partly because others cannot get round to writing. But there must be lots of interesting ornithology going on in Scotland that is never reported in *SBN*. Surely there is more chance of getting text about these if it is solicited! I have yet to be asked who has interesting work that could be reported in *SBN*. I know I should take the initiative but like most people I don't find the time. Perhaps *SB* and *SBN* need wider editorial panels to seek suitable material from more diverse sources around Scotland. Many other groups produce Newsletters, and *SBN* could gain from reading those and reviewing some of their content. I know for example that there is only a small overlap between memberships of SOC and The Seabird Group. Yet material in the *Seabird Group Newsletter* (edited in Scotland) never gets coverage in *SBN* even though much of it originates from work on Scottish seabirds! The folk who have worked hard to produce *SB* and *SBN* are to be commended for their efforts, but they could gain from more help, and an effort needs to be made to spread the load to improve quality. My criticism is of those, like me, who have left all the work to the few.

Bob Furness
Tarbet, Dunbartonshire

I read this with considerable interest as it contains constructive comment in the useful analysis of how often Scottish Birds is referred to compared to other journals.

However, other parts of the letter are based on the misconception that the journal is struggling for material and therefore has somehow lowered its standards. Our policy is to be as sympathetic as possible to club members who offer us papers provided they are original contributions to our knowledge of Scottish birds. This often means that material has to be heavily edited, papers are often pruned into notes and some items submitted to Scottish Birds may only be published in Scottish Bird News. This policy has been endorsed by both the Editorial Committee and the Council. If Scottish Birds was edited in the same way as journals that cater largely for professional scientists then we would undoubtedly find that the flow of papers from amateurs would reduce; this has happened in the past.

I entirely agree that Scottish Birds should concentrate on the distribution of birds within Scotland and factors relevant to this and suggest that the contents page of any recent issue confirms this.

I am surprised that Bob, who has helped produce Scottish Birds in the past, and knows the problems we had then, should subscribe to the view that the journal has deteriorated recently, though I agree we have had some printing and proof reading problems. I do not agree that we should solicit material for SB but my successor may wish to take up the idea.

We have clear guidelines for Scottish Birds within an overall publications policy which we did not have in the past. These are:

1. *The journal only publishes original material on Scottish birds. All other material goes into Scottish Bird News with one exception.*
2. *Obituaries all go into Scottish Birds as the twin track approach of some in Scottish Birds and some in Scottish Bird News was unworkable and hurtful to some members.*
3. *The Editorial Panel has 5 members: Professor D Jenkins, Dr J B Nelson, Dr I Bainbridge, Dr M Marquiss and R Swann with Dr M A Ogilvie as Chairman of the Editorial Committee. They have a wide range of expertise. In addition independent referees are used when appropriate.*

Scottish Bird News definitely needs more input and we will be delighted if more people contribute, whether on seabirds or anything else. However, we do rely on people sending the material to us – we do not have the time to go out and look for it. We have said this sort of thing rather often and would love to see our names less often in the magazine – we often do not sign all we write but have received complaints about this as well!

Several new bird magazines are on the market while others, including British Birds and Bird Study, have been extensively and expensively revamped. We are working on changes to Scottish Birds and Scottish Bird News but without a substantial injection of cash cannot produce a glossy full colour magazine on our members' contributions.

Stan da Prato

Dear Sir

Conservation status of Golden Eagle

Most sources quote a UK population size of about 420 pairs of Golden Eagles but usually fail to note that, in 1992, only 119 of these reared young. At a time of continuing persecution and pressure to limit raptor numbers would it not be best if summaries differentiated between breeding and non breeding pairs?

The Golden Eagle is Amber listed as a species of only medium conservation concern, due to its European status, even though it meets criteria relevant to the Red list of high concern. These are 1) a population decline during 1800-1995 from c550-420 pairs and 2) it is a rare breeder with a 5 year mean of 200-300 breeding pairs per year, all data from *Birds of Prey in the UK: Back from the Brink*. BTO et al 1999. I find this surprising given the known level and effects of persecution in some areas. Given the species' decline in fringe areas such as the south and east, and the 72% breeding failure in 1992, is it not time to recognise that the Golden Eagle is a species of high conservation concern?

The failure to distinguish territorial from breeding pairs gives a false impression of population strength. The species range expansion into Northern Ireland and northern England during the 1950s implies a larger base population than was thought and its retreat from these areas suggests a population decline. While the similarity in the results of the 2 national surveys has been taken as a sign of stability it could well hide a slow decline if the total figure includes a large number of pairs occupying non viable territories.

It seems likely that 1999 was another poor breeding season. I feel that the Golden Eagle has been side lined in recent years with the causes of local declines 'known' to be persecution and habitat changes but it seems to be forgotten that the sum of local declines is a national decline.

David Walker,
Penrith

Help Capercaillie and Black Grouse

In Britain as a whole, Black Grouse numbers have fallen by 75% in 10 years, while Caper has achieved rarity status – only about 1000 birds left from a population that in its heyday probably numbered over 20,000.

With all this in mind, the SOC has aligned itself with other conservation bodies and birdwatching tour companies in backing a newly drawn up Code of Conduct for grouse watchers. The Code is available free (but enclose SAE) from **RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG18 2DL**, or via the RSPB website **www.rspb.ork.uk** – but its main tips are as follows:

* Consider looking for Capercaillie and BlackGrouse in autumn and winter, when numbers are highest and also when lekking is less important for productivity.
* Avoid looking for Caper leks at dawn for the time being. Hopefully, arrangements to view at least one on a nature reserve may be possible this year.
* Watch from a car wherever possible; stay in the car and do not start up until the birds have gone.
* Stay on forest tracks and paths. Do not wander in the Heather and Blaeberry to flush birds, especially in spring when they have vulnerable young.

Julian Hughes

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01687 482417**

Environmental studies in Glasgow and the West of Scotland

Are you interested in learning more about the environment, ecology or the natural history of Scottish birds, mammals and plants? If so, the Department of Adult & Continuing Education (DACE) at the University of Glasgow would like to hear from you. DACE is part of the Faculty of Education and provides part time courses for the wider community. Courses are given in science, archaeology, arts and languages. We are currently expanding our programme of part time environmental studies in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Courses will involve lectures, study days, residential and non residential field excursions. We would like to know of topics that you may be interested in studying. We would also like to hear from those of you who may have experience of teaching environmental studies and would be interested in becoming a part time tutor.

Please contact **Dr Dominic McCafferty at the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, 59 Oakfield Avenue, Glasgow G12 8LW. Tel: 0141 330 4394 email d.mccafferty@educ.gla.ac.uk**

SOC NOTICES

Bequest

The sad death of Gerard Sandeman, a founder member of the SOC, occurred last November. Before he died he had arranged that his notebooks which cover a lifelong interest in Scottish birds, particularly in the Lothians, should be given to the Club. These have now been added to our archive section. He also bequeathed his bird books to the library. Our thanks are due to his wife Peggy.

David Clugston

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1999 were:

October - 1st £30 A Sprott, Bonnyrigg; 2nd £20 A McNeill, Stirling; 3rd £10 W Taylor, Auldgarth.
November - 1st £150 M Nicoll, Tayport; 2nd £75 M Lennox, Melrose; 3rd £50 R Craig, Peebles; 4th £30 S Howe, Torphins; 5th £20 H Harper, Edinburgh; 6th £10 N Elkins, Cupar.
December - 1st £50 M Everett, Huntingdon; 2nd £30 V Tulloch, Gigha; 3rd £20 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 4th £10 D Boomer, Cheshire.

Well done and thank you to all 200 Club supporters. We maintained the 200 members achieved last year. At the time of writing in late January a decision about the location of our Headquarters and Offices has still to be made. Where-ever we are, there will always be a need to maintain the decoration and refurbishment of the building we occupy. These were the aims of the 200 Club when it was originally authorized by Council at the end of 1988, with the first draw being made in June 1989. Such has been its popularity that in its first 11 years to May 2000 it has raised almost £11,000 for the SOC, with a similar sum being returned in prizes to 200 Club members.

The 200 Club's twelfth year starts on 1 June. Reminder notices for those who do not pay by standing order will be sent to existing members in April. Remember that this is an annual subscription that **never** increases, so your continuted support will be much appreciated. If you would like to join, please send me a cheque for £12, payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. This will cover the 12 months from 1 June and will be acknowledged. The only conditions are that you must by an SOC member and over 18. Some 45 prizes are given each year with sums varying from £150 to £10. Please contact me if you want further information.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896) 822176.

Appeal for speakers for branch programmes

The arrangements for compiling the programme of winter lectures for Branches has been discussed by the Management Committee, following a request from Council that they should consider improvements to the procedure. It has been agreed that HQ will continue to try and provide a 'big name' speaker each year. A small sub committee will be formed to identify other potential speakers. Members and branches are asked to submit names of likely individuals who can be approached for the 2000/2001 winter season.

Isle of May Bird Observatory

This year there are still weeks available to book in April-May and July-October when spectacular falls of birds can occur. Weeks are also available in the summer, when the island is teeming with breeding seabirds, and in the October period when the Grey Seals come ashore to pup. Although priority is given to bookings of a week or more, weekend or part week bookings can be made under special circumstances.

Recent highlights have included Two-barred Crossbill, Tawny Pipit, Richard's Pipit and Melodious Warbler and last year's finds were Yellow-browed Warbler, Pallas's Warbler and Thrush Nightingale.

A week spent at this historic observatory is a unique experience and enquiries can be made to the Hon Bookings Secretary **Mike Martin, 2 Manse Park, Uphall, W Lothian EH52 6NX.**

Thanks

Once again may we thank the many volunteers who give assistance in the office, and also to those who came in to pack and send out the December mailing. If you would like to assist with this task please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on **0131 556 6042** for details.

Future management at Insh Marshes

In the autumn RSPB Scotland held public meetings in Kincraig and Kingussie to discuss the management at Insh Marshes Nature Reserve over the next 5 years and a representative from each community has agreed to assist with the development of the new management plan for the site. Their contact details are: **Mr Alasdair Macleod, Carn Ban Kincraig, PH21 1NU: Tel 01540 651 313.** and **Mr Gordon MacPherson, 3 Cluny Terrace, Kingussie: Tel. 01540 662275.**

A draft of the 5 year management plan will be drawn up and available for comment towards the end of the year.

History of bird netting

An 88 page illustrated report by John Young and sponsored by Angus College is available from : **Ken Bruce, Mallaig, Wellington Street, Glencaple, Dumfries DG1 4RA. Tel 01387 770336**. Price £3.50 inc p&p. All revenue is to be donated to promote conservation in birds through ringing.

REQUESTS

Colour photos wanted

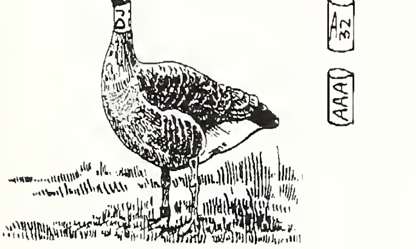
As you will see we have introduced colour into this issue of *SBN* as explained on the front page. Unfortunately, most of the stock of photographs held in Regent Terrace is black and white, so perhaps some of you would like to donate good colour photographs which can then be used in our publictions. As always photographers are acknowledged.

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

As part of a long term study of Aberdeen's roof nesting Oystercatchers, we are fitting the birds with Darvic rings on the left leg. These rings are white or yellow and bear a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits, eg A26, reading down the leg. We would be grateful for any sightings, even incomplete ones, and can provide a prompt history. Please inform either: **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS (01224 483717)** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Aberdeen AB23 8PP (01224 823184).**

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329).**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Neck collared Whooper Swans

Since 1990 Whooper Swans have been marked in Germany using yellow neck collars. Up to spring 1999 c100 individual birds had been marked with yellow neck collars. Please send sightings including site (country, area, coordinates), date, size of group, partner of the bird sighted, number of offspring of the pair, and habitat to: **Axel Degen, Tannenburgstr. 11, D-49084 Osnabrueck, Germany. Email: Axel-Degen@t-online.de**

Neck collared White-fronted Geese

In 1998 the University of Osnabruck (Dept of Ethology, Goose Research Group) in cooperation with IBN-DLO, started putting black neck collars with white codes on White-fronted Geese. These are similar to the ones used on Greylags in Scandinavia. They are composed of one big upright letter and 2 smaller numbers below arranged at a right angle.

Please send any information of sightings (country, area, coordinates), date, size of group, partner of bird sighted, number of offspring of the pair, and habitat, to; **Prof Dr Hans-Heiner Bergman, University of Osnabrueck, AG Ganseforschung, Barbarastr. 11, D-49069 Osnabrueck, Germany. Email: bergmann@biologie.uni-osnabrueck.de.** Further information can be seen at **http://members.aol.com/Kruckenbrg/**

Ring Ouzel study group

Birders across the UK are being asked to look out for ringed Ring Ouzels this spring and summer, as part of an effort to discover more about this declining upland bird. Ring Ouzels in England and Scotland have been colour ringed during the last 2 years and birdwatchers are asked to report any sightings during migration, the breeding season and, particularly in late summer, since almost nothing is known about where Ring Ouzels spend the 8 weeks before southward migration. Colour combinations and locations (6 figure grid reference if possible) should be sent to **Ring Ouzel Study Group, c/o Julian Hughes, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL,** or e-mail **ringouzel@hotmail.com**

Edinburgh Swift survey

Please send in your records of Swifts in Edinburgh, especially screaming parties and nests, to **Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh EH21 6UW.** This survey is organised by the SOC in cooperation with the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership.

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to: **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

SOC car stickers

Ian Andrews has also designed a smart new car sticker featuring the Club's new logo. These can be purchased from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, at 50pence each plus a second class stamp.

Recent Reports December 1999-February 2000 a review of winter 1999-2000.

One outstanding November record is the first winter **Mourning Dove** present at Carinish, North Uist from the 13-15 November when it was assumed to have died overnight. It capped a tremendous year on the Outer Hebrides and will be the first Scottish record and only the second British record, after one on the Isle of Man in October 1989, if accepted.

There is no doubt that the main event of the winter was the **Iceland Gull** influx, which produced the largest numbers since 1993. Numbers were good in December with c50 reported though the peak numbers occurred in February with a minimum of 200 seen. As has been the case for a lot of the last 20 years the totals for **Iceland Gull** exceeded those for **Glaucous Gull**, with in February the ratio being 4:1 in favour of Iceland with approximately 50 reported Glaucous. Seven sites held counts of 8 or more Icelands, all of which were in the northwest, with the largest counts being 22 in Stornoway harbour on the 1 March, 18 at Mallaig in the last week of February and 15 in Lerwick harbour in the last week of February also. It was also the best year ever for the species in the Clyde area with possibly up to 40 individuals reported. Amongst this influx no less than 11 **Kumlien's Gulls** were reported – a record showing. Two **Ross's Gulls** were reported, adults seen briefly on Unst and at Ullapool in January and February respectively whilst the 2 sightings of a first winter **Ivory Gull** in January may relate to the same bird, on Lewis from at least the 10-18 January and on Islay from the 23-24 January. Elsewhere amongst gulls 2 **Yellow-legged Gulls** were reported in January and February, 5 **Ring-billed Gulls** were seen and 14 **Mediterranean Gulls** were reported including a Belgian colour ringed bird in Ayrshire adding to the Hungarian, French and Dutch ringed birds seen previously in Scotland.

The **Pied-billed Grebe** was on Benbecula from 28 November-11 December (the seventh record for Scotland) Also on Benbecula the **Greater Yellowlegs** remained throughout though proved very elusive. Other wintering waders included a **Whimbrel** in Ayrshire, 2 **Common Sandpipers** (in Argyll and Renfrewshire), 2 **Spotted Redshanks** at WWT Caerlaverock and 8 **Green Sandpipers**. A **Black-necked Grebe** at Sumburgh on the 16 February was only the sixth Shetland record whilst gales in early January produced several interesting seabird records. These included 2 **Grey Phalaropes** on the 3 January at Fraserburgh and Brora, a **Balearic Shearwater** at Saltcoats on the 12 January and 5 **Pomarine Skua** reports (with 9 additional birds reported in December). Also unseasonal was the **Glossy Ibis** on Papa Westray on 5-6 January with presumably the same bird responsible for the sighting at St. Fergus, Aberdeenshire on the 7 January.

Amongst wildfowl the central Scotland **Taiga Bean Goose** flock reached its highest level ever with 188 birds seen. A colour ringed adult **Lesser White-fronted Goose** was amongst the Solway Barnacles from at least the 10 January. It is thought to be most likely from the Swedish feral reintroduction scheme many of which winter amongst **Barnacles** in the Netherlands. It was a record breaking winter in Scotland for **Green-winged Teal** with 16 drakes reported whilst a comparable showing was attained by **American Wigeon** with 7 drakes seen including 3 on east Mainland Orkney all in discreet **Eurasian Wigeon** flocks. The female **Black Duck** continued to reside at Loch Fleet paired up to a **Mallard**, the only **Ring-necked Ducks** seen were 2 females on Benbecula whilst the 2 **King Eiders** seen were on Shetland on the 23 February and the usual drake at Tayport, Fife from the 23 January and then on the Ythan Estuary from the 2 March.

Five white morph **Gyr Falcons** were reported from the 3 February onwards, 2 on Shetland including one on Fair Isle from the 3-16 February, one on Orkney, one on the Outer Hebrides and a third calendar year female which was found exhausted on a fixed vessel west of Shetland on the 3 March, taken into care in Aberdeenshire and then released in Glen Lui, Deeside on the 10 March to an assembled appreciative gathering of c100 people. It was last seen heading high over the hills in the glen in a NNE direction, to be ever seen again? A bird released at the Lecht in the 1970s in similar circumstances was present in the area for around 2 months afterwards. Only 2 **Rough-legged Buzzards**, reported briefly in Highland and Borders in February, was a somewhat dismal showing whilst only small numbers of **Little Auks** were seen this winter in Scotland, the best numbers being on the Outer Hebrides.

The 3 **Shore Larks** reported were all in Lothian whilst it was the best winter in Scotland for **Waxwings** since 1996/7 with numbers peaking in December before tailing off. The 5 **Great Grey Shrikes** reported represents a reasonable showing whilst all 4 **Arctic Redpolls** reported were in Caithness and Sutherland. The largest numbers of **Snow Buntings** seen were on the Black Isle with an exceptional flock of c2000 birds reported there on the 19 December. It was yet another dire winter for **Lapland Buntings** unfortunately a situation that is now the norm. It has been a very good winter for **Twite** in Lothian with 400 at Whiteadder on 2 January, a record count.

Angus Murray

First winter Iceland Gull, Oban harbour. February 2000 *Sandy McNeil*
Part of an unusually large influx of Iceland Gulls to the north and west early in 2000 see p19.

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Scottish Bird News

Edited by
Stan da Prato
Assisted by
Ian Andrews and
Sylvia Laing

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 64th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

passwords to access members' web pages
'golden' & 'eagle'

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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC No 58 June 2000

Property matters

At the May meeting of Council, it was agreed that I should put together a few words to bring members up to date regarding Club Headquarter/Scottish Centre for Ornithology issues. Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of the following motion at its meeting in November last year– *"That a group be formed to find and cost a financially viable alternative location identified for a Scottish Centre for Ornithology which will offer opportunities for the development of the SOC in the future"*. This followed a realisation that, in the absence of further rental income, the Club would soon be eating into its savings to maintain membership benefits. A move to a new site could bring with it improvements in facilities, decrease in running costs, wider accessibility, new partnerships and, along with other changes, help widen the appeal of the Club. The possibility of adopting a location adjacent to a wildlife site was raised, as were the advantages of an energy-saving building.

A Working Group was formed and has now met on a number of occasions. The search has focussed on 2 general areas, chosen on the basis of proximity to roads, rail and centres of population. Currently a site in Linlithgow is being actively pursued. The Bridge of Allan area and, in particular, the University of Stirling Campus has also been looked at. Discussions have taken place with a firm of Chartered Surveyors in the area and with the University's Estates and Buildings Section. The major problem with the University is that it has a policy of leasing, rather than selling, ground. One or 2 sites in the Stirling area have been investigated and dismissed as impractical. In addition, fruitful discussions have taken place with Stirling and West Lothian Planning Authorities.

Here is your chance to help, if you know anyone in the Bridge of Allan area with ground (approximately 0.5 acres) that might suit our purposes, please let me know. Consideration would also be given to property suitable for conversion and/or extension.

The Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, FIBOT, has an involvement in a potential move through the wording of the Trust Document by which 21 Regent Terrace is held, and a meeting was convened at Vane Farm. A wide ranging discussion took place, during which FIBOT expressed some concern regarding the possible move from Edinburgh and SOC's current financial position in light of the loss of lease income. It was agreed that each party would provide their interpretation of a Scottish Centre for Ornithology. Following discussion at Council, a distillation of 2 very similar definitions prepared by Ian Andrews and Peter Vandome, a definition has been submitted. FIBOT will be kept informed of the evolving situation.

An approach has been made to a number of like-minded organisations with a view to finding potential leasees of accommodation outside Edinburgh. Despite the specific wording of the resolution and the various reports prepared for Council by Ian Darling and myself, the viability of 21 Regent Terrace is also being further tested.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those individuals and branches that have taken the time to write to me expressing their views. The overall impression I get, in line with the vote taken at Council, is that the time is right for a move. While it is taking a good deal longer to organise than I expected, I personally still consider a move to be the correct option for us. Your views on this and related matters are still welcome.

Brian Downing
President

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A migrant Dotterel on Tinto Hill, Lanarkshire in May 2000. See Recent Reports on pages 11-12
Mark Darling

The Songbird Survival Action Group

The precipitous decline in populations of many songbirds since the mid-1970s is a concern to everyone with any interest in the UK environment. In many ways, any organisation which attempts to draw attention to this decline, and tries to get something done about it, is to be welcomed. The Songbird Survival Action Group (SSAG) is such an organisation. It differs from other conservation organisations, however, in maintaining that a principle cause in the decline of songbirds is the increasing numbers of certain raptors, in particular the Peregrine and Sparrowhawk, and is lobbying to allow sensitive control of their populations to aid the recovery of songbirds. They want to return the populations of all birds to early 1970s levels.

Most SOC members will already be familiar with at least some of the major papers and studies which have examined the causes of declines in farmland birds, and those which have examined whether there is a role for raptors in limiting the population of songbirds. The Report of the UK Raptor Working Group (2000) listed over 15 such studies, all of which have failed to implicate raptors in the decline, and concluded that changes in agricultural practices have been the primary cause of the disappearance of songbirds.

Personal communication with founder members of the SSAG has shown that they believe these studies to be flawed and unreliable. Furthermore, they accuse the authors of these reports, and the BTO and RSPB, of being disingenuous, deliberately misleading the public and politicians in order to protect raptors at the expense of small birds. Indeed, members of the SSAG have to believe this, since they seem to 'know' that raptors are the causes of songbird decline. (Although they claim to have researched this, they produce no proper evidence). They want, as do us all, more research to be done. However, one gets the feeling that any research which does not blame raptors for killing all the songbirds will also be dismissed as flawed - for they preempt the results of any future research by asking that The Government must then be persuaded to relax the laws protecting some predators.

The level of ignorance about basic ornithology among some members of the SSAG is staggering. One of their assertions is that the Red Kite re-introduction programme will place a further burden on songbirds, and they want it stopped. The reintroduced kites in England seem to eat, almost entirely, carrion, but will take the occasional fledgling Woodpigeon (hardly a source of concern to farmers!). What this suggests is that the SSAG is primarily an anti-raptor organisation, rather than being pro-songbird.

Anti-raptor arguments are common within the pages of the Scottish press, and have been answered with some assiduity by members of the public and the conservation organisations. But it would be a mistake to write the SSAG off. Although somewhat evasive about their affiliations, early publications by the SSAG gave the names of some, presumably founder, members who could be contacted for further information. The Scottish contact is one Linda Brooks. Although the publicity sheet did not mention this, she is the Secretary of the Scottish Homing Union, and a co-author of the anti-raptor *Save our Sport* document. Other founder members are Snowy Jeffs, another pigeon fancier, and Gavin Morris, a Suffolk smallholder who keeps free range chickens. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the SSAG is a coalition of anti raptor people who are trying a new and roundabout route to achieve the legalisation of raptor persecution.

If anyone were to cynically create an organisation aimed at subverting public sentimentality and ignorance in order to achieve an ulterior aim, they could do little better than the current SSAG setup. Whilst I am not suggesting that the SSAG is so cynical (clearly we are all concerned about songbirds), its members seem intelligent and determined to prove that raptors should be controlled. They have and will continue to analyse and criticise all the literature on the subject, and will pounce on any apparent inaccuracies or inconsistencies. It is up to the rest of us to avoid glib statements and sound-bites, 'raptors are off the hook', 'raptors have no effect on songbirds' *etc*, and to keep up with all the available research. This research has suggested that the declines of songbirds and other farmland birds is primarily due to land management, but this is not the end of the matter, not the last line, and more research needs to be done. Members of the SOC will participate in this research, and support the other conservation organisations in making the prejudices and arrogance shown by the SSAG an irrelevance.

Martin Collinson

Goldeneye hazards – Loch Tay

Goldeneyes winter on Loch Tay, but by April only a few pairs of potential breeders remain. The first record of breeding was the sighting of a duck with 6 young on 23 May 1995 from the south side of the Loch. Since then 3 nestboxes have been sited, 2 on the north shore and one on the south. In 1997, one duck used a box but it was not until 1998 that a duck laid 4 eggs and reared 2 young. 1999 was blank but one box contained down and this year, on 28 April a box was examined which contained 8 warm eggs, the duck being on the water. The box was again checked on 1 May, but the eggs were cold, although 2 ducks and 1 drake were seen around. By 6 May the box was deserted. It is assumed that the continuous disturbance of sail boats, accompanied by frequent visits from the Edinburgh University Centre speed boat caused the desertion of the nest - the duck needs to feed and the presence of so many boats in the vicinity has kept the birds away.

Pat Sandeman

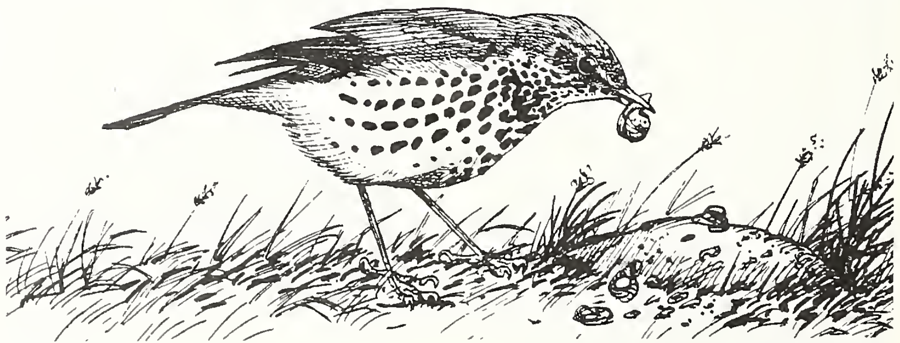
Sparrowhawk behaviour

One morning in early April, we were surprised to see a male Sparrowhawk apparently trying to eat peanuts on the hanging 'squirrel proof' feeder. Closer observation showed that the bird was in some difficulty, flapping wildly and apparently trying to release itself from the wires. We assumed that it had made a swoop at a feeding passerine, missed and collided with the cage. After a few seconds it managed to get free and sat on the ground (looking rather sheepish!) for about a minute before flying off, apparently no worse for the experience. It would be interesting to know if anyone else has observed anything similar.

Fay and Ian Pascoe

I was interested to see the short article, 'Sparrowhawk encounter', on page 11 of *SBN* 57, in which a Sparrowhawk was reported drowning a Jay. Although unusual, this behaviour has been described previously. *British Birds* 90:524-525, for example, contains 4 Behaviour Notes, describing Sparrowhawks drowning Jay, Magpie, Starling and Corn Bunting. In all cases, the prey was deliberately brought to water in order to be drowned!

Martin Collinson



Song Thrush *David Mitchell*

Spring Conference

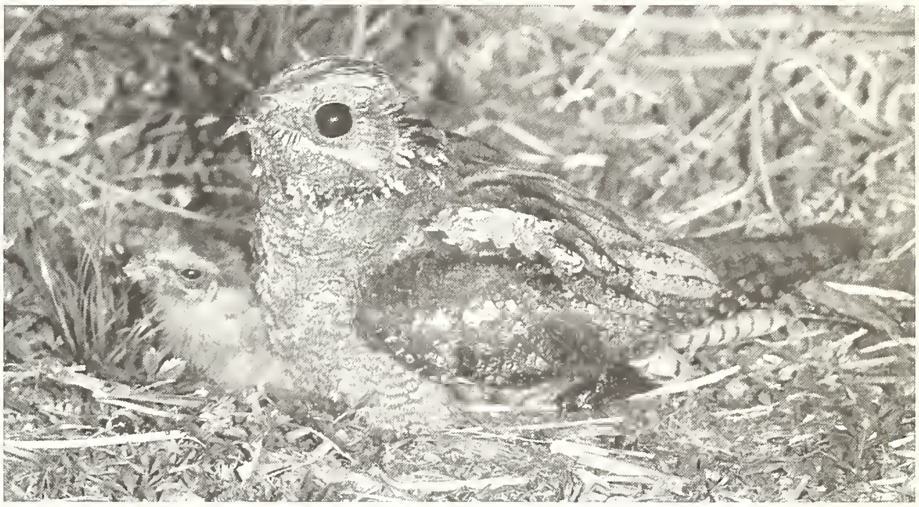
Christine Dugeon of the Barony College welcomed over 200 SOC/BTO members to the 2000 Spring Conference. Chris Rollie, the RSPB's South-west Scotland Conservation Officer, got the conference off to a cracking start with an informative and well illustrated talk on the impact of agriculture and forestry on bird populations in Dumfries and Galloway. The region has suffered the greatest changes in land use of any in the UK. Starting on high ground we heard of the damage done by a prolific population of wild goats on the, now small, numbers of breeding Golden Plover and Dotterel. When one hears that 25% of Dumfries and Galloway is covered in forestry and that 63% of the heather moorland has vanished, no wonder some bird populations have suffered! Black Grouse did well when the forestry was young but not as the trees matured. A restructuring programme with Forest Enterprise hopes to reverse the trend. Buzzards, however, continue to expand, and Song Thrushes do very well along the forest edges, compared to much of the UK. Eighty percent of Scotland's Nightjars occur in Dumfries and Galloway. The increase in sheep numbers and subsequent overgrazing has not helped species like Red Grouse, Hen Harrier and Curlew.

Ken Bruce, of the North Solway Ringing Group, told us of the discovery in 1993 of a pair of breeding Reed Warblers near Dumfries. Since then about 5-7 pairs appear to be breeding annually. Up to 29 birds have been trapped and ringed, with a single recovery from Rutland. It would seem likely that this new colonisation was the result of the spread of birds across the Solway from Cumbria. New and potential breeding sites have been located in reed beds along the River Nith, near Caerlaverock, at Woodhall and Lochmaben.

Andy Wilson, BTO Research Ecologist, started his talk by discussing the population reductions experienced in recent years by so many common birds, before concentrating on Skylark and Lapwing. The numbers of both species in England and Wales has reduced dramatically since the mid 70s. Possible causes relate to changes in farming practices. Among these were increases in agricultural intensity, a loss of mixed farms, a switch to winter sown cereals, and improved drainage. Although the picture was depressing, there were some hopeful signs; the experience with Stone Curlews, which had increased in England in recent years, showed what could be done in partnership with farmers.

Jack Fleming, Agricultural Adviser in Scotland for RSPB, followed. Jack was himself a farmer, a point he stressed when talking to farmers. RSPB's current aim was to seek ways of intervening to help overwintering passerines. Although more efficient farming appeared to imply less suitable winter feeding, possible solutions could be identified. Many farmers were sympathetic and could be persuaded to leave a small patch, say ˘ acre, for birds. If each farmer would do so, improvements to the situation could be made. However, the proposed new EU subsidy rules on field margins could prove difficult. In summary, he said that it was important that land should be actively managed in an environmentally sensitive way, and gave examples of how this could be done. He stressed that there was no single solution, a combination of actions was needed.

After lunch Donald Watson, an SOC founder member and well known artist, gave a humorous account of some local ornithologists in the early days of the Club.



Nightjar with chick *Edmund Fellowes*

Geoff Shaw, Chief Ranger for Forest Enterprise, followed, giving an account of bird changes in the Galloway Forests, listing winners and losers. There are currently 180 species, of which 110 breed. In dividing the area into habitat types, species such as Peregrine and Dotterel had not been affected, though Ring Ouzel and Golden Plover had declined. Species such as Ravens and Buzzards had shown the greatest increase. Water birds had seen little change though Dippers had been losers due to acidification of water, and Grey Wagtail a winner following clear felling. Red Grouse had declined greatly due to heather loss, increased grazing and tree planting; Curlew, Dunlin and Snipe had also decreased. Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl numbers had initially increased due to the larger vole population, but decreased again as the trees grew larger. Meadow Pipit numbers had similarly been affected. Tree-nesting Merlins were also losers. There had been considerable changes in forest species, both within the forests and at their edges. Within forests, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Bullfinch and Redpoll had been losers, while Goldcrest, Crossbill and Goshawk were winners. On the forest edge 50 species now bred. Barn Owl, Nightjar, Woodcock and Song Thrush had all been winners. In conclusion, he noted that, while the *number* of species had not changed, individual species had been affected by changes in land use.

Dr Richard Phillips, Research Ecologist from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, then discussed research on Barnacle Geese on the Solway between 1948 and 2000. Solway numbers had increased from 3/400 in 1948 to over 24,000 this year. The increase had been greatest in the past 30 years due to greater protection, with a ban on shooting, the establishment of the WWT Reserve at Caerlaverock and greater protection in the breeding areas. Seventy eight percent now feed on agricultural land rather than saltmarshes. Although the species' survival rate of 90-95% was very good, it had been noted in research in 1978/81 that very few chicks returned from the Svalbard colonies, possibly due to Arctic Foxes. Some 9000 birds have been ringed and radio-tracking has been started. It is hoped to gain a greater insight into the reasons for the increase in total numbers arriving each winter on the Solway, while the proportion of juveniles decreases.

After coffee Geoff Sheppard gave an insight into the Barn Owl population of Dumfries and Galloway. It was a pleasure to hear and see the account of their survival in Scotland's south-west corner delivered by an enthusiast so knowledgeable of their distribution and behaviour at first hand. Accompanied by slides of high quality, often taken in the restrictive conditions of their nest sites, and delivered with wit, the lecture gave a clear account of the life histories of different Barn Owl pairs in a variety of situations.

The final speaker of the day was Professor Ian Newton. His 30 year study of breeding

Sparrowhawks in Dumfriesshire left no doubt as to his personal experience of working with these birds. Ian's professionalism enabled us to understand the complex analysis such quantities of data generated. One was left to wonder at the variation in numbers of offspring raised, with only 22% of offspring in any year surviving to breeding age.

Catering arrangements were well organised, and an excellent cold buffet lunch, which included delicious homemade sweets, went down a treat.

A selection of local conservation projects and and excellent display by local photographers all enhanced the venue.

Thanks are due to our 3 south-west branches for an excellent conference. Well done, the Dumfries, Stewarty and West Galloway SOC branches!

This article has been put together from reports received from David Clugston, John Davies, Alastair Peirse-Duncombe and Tom & Biddy Gray.

Fulmar *Arthur Gilpin*

Scotland's seabirds snagged by marine litter

Unfortunately in this hustling, bustling convenience age, a pristine, litter-free beach is a rare sight along Scotland's otherwise stunning coastline. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) annual Beachwatch coastal litter survey reported an average of 1819 items per km of Scottish coast in 1999. The same is true the world over, as our planet's shores and seas succumb to a man-made tide of marine garbage. It is estimated that the weight of garbage dumped into the world's seas annually is treble the weight of fish removed from it.

Not only is marine litter above and below the sea aesthetically unsightly, it is hazardous to those who work on the sea, and poses a deadly threat to all marine life. It is impossible to assess the full impact of marine litter on ocean going birds, or indeed any of our marine life. The limited research being undertaken has been restricted to land-based observations.

One million seabirds are estimated to die every year from entanglement in, or ingestion of, plastics.

Entanglement

Nylon fishing nets and fishing line, plastic bags, strapping bands and 6-pack carriers adrift at sea or washed ashore entangle marine life. Of around 136 species of marine vertebrate reported worldwide entangled in marine debris, seabirds have the dubious distinction of being most represented, accounting for 51 species.

Entangling can adversely affect seabirds and other marine life as follows:

* Fishing nets trap and immobilise seabirds, killing them by drowning, starvation or impeding their escape from predators.
* Smaller plastic items increase the drag of seabirds, reducing their efficiency when foraging for food and evading predators.
* Small items snagged ashore or on the seabed ensnare seabirds and other life, resulting in starvation or drowning.
* If marine litter becomes tightly bound around the afflicted animal, it restricts growth and can cut off circulation to wings, legs and head. This is particularly poignant when plastic items, inadvertently collected as nesting material, entangle fledglings. Gannet chicks have been known to suffer such an ignominious fate.

Available evidence suggests that ingestion of marine litter has afflicted even more marine species than entanglement.

Ingestion

Of the world's 312 seabird species, more than a third are known to have ingested plastic. In some species of seabird, almost 100% of the population ingest marine litter. Of equal concern is the apparent inability of seabirds to excrete plastics, there being a marked absence of debris from droppings.

But why do seabirds eat marine litter, and plastics in particular? They often confuse small plastic pellets with fish-eggs and plankton, ingest plastics with other food and even feed them to their hapless chicks. Once ingested the marine litter has four principal adverse affects:

* Physically damaging the digestive tract (scarring, ulceration and occasional penetration into the body cavity) leading to infection, starvation and death.
* Mechanically blocking the passage of food, resulting in starvation and death.
* Impairing foraging efficiency due to an artificial sensation of satiation or from impaired digestive function.
* Releasing toxins due to erosion of the debris within the gut or from absorption of contaminants on the surface of the ingested debris.

Puffins in the North Sea have been found with balls of elastic thread in their stomachs, presumably after mistaking them for Sand Eels. Plastic consistently tops the marine litter league as the most common item recorded during Beachwatch.

Sources of marine litter

Although marine litter afflicts beaches and marine life close to home, it is an international problem. Ocean currents carry debris thousands of miles across the globe. In one example, coded and dated multi-coloured plastic bracelets from Canadian lobster fisheries have been recorded on the coasts of Ireland, western Scotland and eastern Shetland. Where else does it come from?

* Ocean-based sources of marine debris include commercial shipping, fishing vessels, cruise liners, military fleets, research vessels, ferries, tugboats and barges, offshore oil and gas platforms and recreational boats. A 1982 survey estimated that the world's fleet of vessels (excluding fishing vessels) dumped at least 4.8 million metal, 450,000 plastic and 300,000 glass containers into the sea every day.

* Sewage-related debris consists of cotton bud sticks, sanitary towels, backing strips, tampons, nappies, condoms, razor blades, toilet fresheners and of course human waste, through sewage outfalls discharging raw or inadequately treated sewage.

* Land-based sources include litter carried to sea via drains, rivers and storm water systems, recreational beach users, fly tipping, agriculture, local businesses, including holiday parks and fast-food outlets, and unprotected landfill sites.

What can be done?

How can we help stem the ever-tightening world wide web of marine litter?

As recorded during *Beachwatch* 1999, recreation was the single greatest source of litter on Scotland's beaches last year. If we all took our litter home and disposed of it appropriately, a third of the problem would be eradicated immediately. Even when hundreds of miles from the sea, we can help marine wildlife by bagging and binning cotton buds, sanitary products, razor blades, air fresheners and nappies instead of treating the toilet like a wet waste basket.

If you live near the sea and want to take a proactive stance against marine litter, why not organise or volunteer in a Marine Conservation Society *Beachwatch* or *Adopt-a-Beach* project?

Launched with the support of Readers Digest in 1993, Beachwatch is a UK-wide coastal survey. Data from local clean-ups is collated and provides a 'snapshot' of the amount of litter dropped or washed up around Britain's coastline. Adopt-a-Beach was launched following the success of Beachwatch. In addition to the September Beachwatch survey, Adopt-a-Beach participants conduct surveys in winter, spring and summer to provide a year-round picture of UK marine litter distribution.

The information gathered by dedicated Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach volunteers can be used by MCS to target the main problem areas.

To find our more about the work of the MCS in Scotland please contact Calum Duncan on 0131 226 6360 or email mcs.scotland@care4free.net.

LETTERS

Dear Sir

There is some very odd mathematics in the report on 'Results from Constant Effort Site monitoring in Fife and Lothian' *SBN* 57:7-8. The number of adult Chiffchaffs ringed cannot drop 500% between one year and the next, when 100% are gone that is the end. As just one was ringed instead of 6 that is down 83%, not 500% (which would be a fall of 30, to minus 24). Most of the percentages in Table 1 are wrong, because they have been calculated by dividing by the number ringed in 1999 instead of 1998. The percentage change from 1998 to 1999 should be calculated as 100 (1999 minus 1998) divided by 1998. I append a recalculated version of the table, showing some dramatic difference in the percentages.

Andrew Macmillan

Dear Mr Macmillan

The editor kindly passed on your letter concerning the above article to us as authors of the piece. Many thanks for taking the time and trouble to identify the problem with the figures and for providing both a corrected version and, more importantly, the correct formula for analysing the data. We had inadvertently used an incorrect formula in the spreadsheet analysis but, as non-scientists and amateur fieldworkers, we do find the data analysis the hardest part of writing up the results, and can use all the mathematical help we get. Although the corrected formula does alter the percentages, the trends illustrated by the new figures remain broadly similar, and as such we believe the papers main points remain valid, which is a relief.

One of the key things we struggled with in preparing the paper was attempting to find a way of identifying when a change was statistically significant. Despite reference to a variety of statistical handbooks, including the BTO *Guide to Statistics for Ornithologists*, we really could not grasp how this could be done. We feel it would have been helpful if Table 1 could have identified which percentage changes were statistically significant. If you have any advice on how this might be achieved we would be very happy to hear it.

It is our hope to repeat this article on an annual basis, and once again we thank you for your help bringing attention to the problems within the data analysis at this early stage. Dodgy mathematics aside, we hope you enjoyed the article.

Les Hatton & Shirley Millar

Correction to Table 1: Combined totals and % change at 5 CES sites in Fife and Lothian

	Juvenile			%Change 1998/99	Adult			%Change 1998/99
	1997	1998	1999		1997	1998	1999	
Wren	86	66	104	57.6	40	41	55	34.1
Dunnock	53	29	64	120.7	46	46	82	78.3
Robin	119	97	132	36.1	31	33	33	0.0
Blackbird	40	47	50	6.4	58	44	70	59.1
Song Thrush	22	12	26	116.7	16	39	36	-7.7
Sedge Warbler	60	19	22	15.8	55	27	52	92.6
Whitethroat	28	17	14	-17.6	23	15	13	-13.3
Garden Warbler	10	5	5	0.0	9	7	9	28.6
Blackcap	30	14	20	42.9	8	11	11	0.0
Chiffchaff	4	6	3	-50.0	0	6	1	-83.3
Willow Warbler	499	374	242	-35.3	223	260	217	-16.5
Goldcrest	95	45	195	333.3	13	7	12	71.4
Long-tailed Tit	38	19	18	-5.3	24	4	4	0.0
Coal Tit	59	22	31	40.9	18	14	6	-57.1
Blue Tit	195	29	47	62.1	50	35	24	-31.4
Great Tit	56	16	21	31.3	30	27	11	-59.3
Treecreeper	17	4	8	100.0	6	4	4	0.0
Chaffinch	52	9	24	166.7	66	59	45	-23.7
Greenfinch	8	1	1	0.0	11	4	4	0.0
Goldfinch	3	2	2	0.0	13	3	11	266.7
Redpoll	14	1	8	700.0	15	4	7	75.0
Bullfinch	35	16	31	93.8	37	27	33	22.2
Yellowhammer	3	4	0	-100.0	10	8	7	-12.5
Reed Bunting	1	2	3	50.0	15	11	16	45.5

Whitethroat *Angus Hogg*

Fifty years of bird watching in the Outer Hebrides

When I first set foot on Lewis on the May Holiday of 1949, to take up a post in Stornoway at an Office of Customs & Excise, my pre-war interest in birds after 6 years at sea in the Navy and 3 dodging about Britain, had somewhat declined. It soon revived when I found that very little interest seemed to be taken in the local natural history and that a niche appeared to be vacant for the likes of me. I soon teamed up with others such as Bobby Macintyre, the late Iain Maclean, the late Willie Matheson, the late Allan Smith (Ness), John M. Macleod (Ness) and the late Sandy Darling, another incomer like myself.

North Uist, looking north-west from Eaval *Ian Andrews*

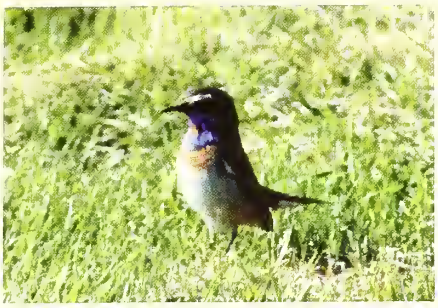
I joined the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and was persuaded by its President, George Waterston, to undertake the Local Recorder's job for the Outer Hebrides, becoming part of a nationwide organisation newly set up to record the changing status of birds throughout Scotland. This involved recording my own observations and those of my colleagues, visiting birdwatchers and local observers. Eventually I was approached by the editor of the *Stornoway Gazette*, Sam Longbotham, to write a regular piece for the paper which enabled me to tell readers what was going on in local natural history. This became a two-way channel used by readers to alert me to their own discoveries and, even as I write this in the year 2000, a letter from a stranger addressed to me care of the *Gazette* has arrived to tell me about a rare Ivory Gull he had found.

Amongst Scottish ornithological literature only one book was concerned solely with the birds of the Outer Hebrides. Harvie-Brown and Buckley's *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides* (1888) and it was long out of print and date. I made friends with Dr James W Campbell who had spent a lifetime amassing a record of all that was then known of our birds with a view to publication but his death supervened. His son, Dr Lennox Campbell, kindly lent me these voluminous and invaluable notes which I hope will find an editor and publisher sometime. A copy has been lodged in the local library.

By the late seventies I was becoming overwhelmed by the spate of incoming information and enquiries and decided to set down what I knew in a book. This, of course, only exacerbated the problem. However, the number of lasting friendships I made more than compensated. I may be accused of "name dropping" but I must mention a few of these ornithological friends from whom I learned so much about the Hebridean birds in particular. Maury Meiklejohn, Professor of Italian at Glasgow University, was one whose incomparable learning and zestful company I enjoyed during his frequent visits. Vero Wynne-Edwards was Professor of Zoology at Aberdeen and kindly wrote a foreword to my guide to our birds. Much encouragement was given by, for example, Dr George Waterston, Dr WRP Bourne, Dr Joe Eggeling, Dr David Bannerman, Dr Maeve Rusk, Charles Palmar and Colin Brown, the then NCC Warden in South Uist. Birds also brought me the privilege of meeting the likes of James Fisher and Roger Tory Peterson and of corresponding with other ornithologists overseas. In 1979 Morton Boyd asked me to contribute to a seminar in Edinburgh on The Natural Environment of the Outer Hebrides, under the aegis of The Royal Society, with a talk on the terrestrial birds and raptors of the Outer Hebrides.

About 1978 the need was felt for a local organisation to coordinate the study of birds in the Outer Hebrides, so Stewart Angus and myself founded the Western Isles Natural History Society, which still functions but with a wider remit.

Dunlin *Fred Westcott*



Adult male Bluethroat on Fair Isle
Hywel Maggs

For various reasons, not the least of which are the vast improvement in inter-island communications the Long Island has become a much more popular destination for birdwatchers and other visitors. Gone are the days of intrepid pioneers coping with primitive transport and widely scattered accommodation. Once upon a time I was carried on a man's back across part of the North Ford when I miscalculated the ebb tide. I have found myself bound for Glasgow as a guest of BEA, in the Excelsior Hotel when the plane could not land at Benbecula owing to strong winds. Similar conditions prevented the inter-island ferry once from berthing at Castlebay and I spent the night in Oban. Further, the increasing sophistication of optical aids and field guides has enabled ever more expert observers to pick up rarities formerly overlooked by the few spare-time watchers of those days.

In my young days professional ornithologists in the Outer Hebrides comprised solitary representatives of the NCC and RSPB in the Uists and, later, of the NCC in Stornoway. Now, we amateurs are vastly outnumbered, especially in the Uists, but can still play a useful part in the accumulation of knowledge.

W Cunningham, Aros, 10 Barony Square
Stornoway, Isle of Lewis

Inchgarth Nature Reserve – a first for the SOC

What started out as a great idea by David Landsman has now been turned into reality by the Grampian Branch. Question – where would you find the SOC's first nature reserve? Answer - on the outskirts of Aberdeen, next to Inchgarth Reservoir at Cults and beside the River Dee. Inchgarth Nature Reserve is an area of wet grassland, some 14 hectares. It became a reserve in March 1998.

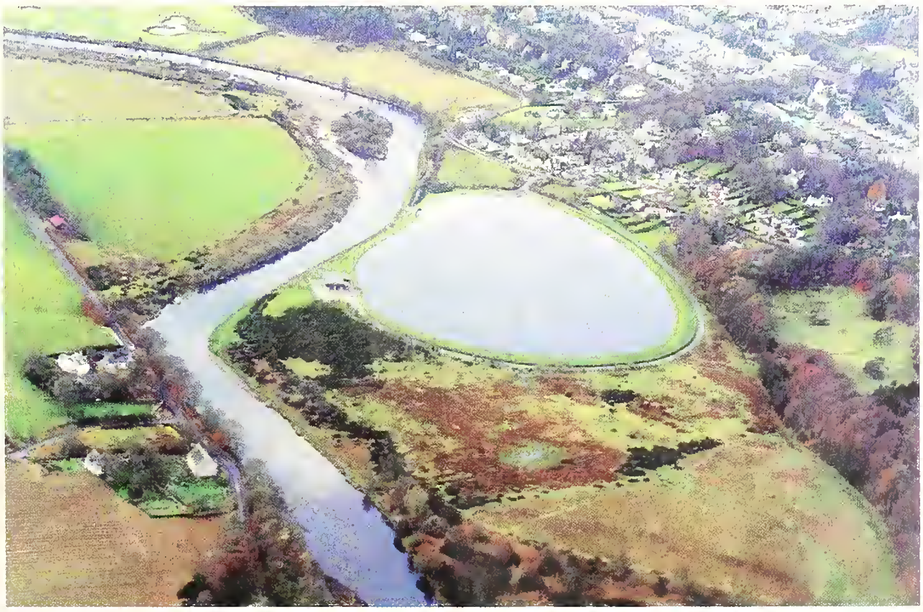
There are many areas of grassland alongside the Dee, most of which flood at times. Inchgarth is almost the last of these before the river enters the sea. Historically both cropped and grazed, in the 1980s part of the area was used as a site camp during the construction of the nearby reservoir. This led to soil compaction, disturbance, and the creation of a small pool. When the site was vacated, low intensity cattle grazing continued, gradually becoming more and more infrequent. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the conditions were excellent for birds, with a wide of range of species being recorded, including rarities such as Little Egret, Barnacle Goose, Garganey, Avocet and Lesser Yellowlegs. Since then the area has become much more rank, though it is still wet. Over 90 species have been recorded. At present large numbers of Snipe and a few Jack Snipe winter on the reserve, together with some ducks, and in summer Skylark, Reed Bunting, Sedge Warbler and Moorhen breed. Lapwing once bred but do not do so now. Nearby scrub and woodland hold a wide range of warblers. The whole area is both visually attractive and good for birds.

The reserve is owned by the North of Scotland Water Authority (NoSWA), and has now been leased to the SOC for 10 years. Grampian Branch have taken on full responsibility for its management, the main aim being to ensure that the grassland is grazed properly. We have so far renewed the fence round the entire site, with grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Aberdeen Countryside Project (ACP). The rushes and rank grass have been topped by a contractor, paid for by funds raised by local birders through the annual bird race. We have let the grazing to a local farmer and hope now that the rank grassland will be grazed down and trampled, so creating the right conditions for breeding and passage waders. In future years, a grazing regime appropriate for breeding waders will be introduced (when we have some!). Grazing should also improve the botanical diversity and enhance the site for invertebrates. In time, we may try to increase the wet area or create new wetland features. It is intended to sow a cover-crop over a small area to encourage seed-eating passerines.

Public access is possible all round the edges of the reserve, and we plan to improve viewing facilities through the provision of simple screens, to encourage birdwatchers to visit and record what they see, and intend to do our best to ensure that the local community are fully aware of our management and support us. The Inchgarth reserve can be accessed on foot from the entrance to the reservoir at NJ899027 (on Inchgarth Road). Please park with consideration.

We are very grateful to NoSWA, SNH, ACP and numerous local SOC members for their support. Further developments at Inchgarth reserve will be reported in future issues of *SBN*.

Ian Francis on behalf of the SOC Grampian Branch committee: email ifnp@clara.co.uk



The SOC Grampian Branch Inchgarth Reserve near Aberdeen (in the foreground) *David Bain*

Black Eagle studies in the Matobo Hills

In July 1999 I travelled to Bulawayo to observe and help with the Matobo Hills Black Eagle Study as my second RSPB sabbatical project. This was a fascinating visit, not only for the spectacular and "exotic" location of the study but also due to the many parallels with Raptor Study Group work in Scotland. Black Eagles are like our own native Golden Eagle and I was struck by their behavioural similarities, although observing displaying Black Eagles from the summit of a granite inselberg in the sun, while watching a noisy troop of Baboons plundering their way through dry bush 500 feet below, may have the edge on snatched sightings of a sky dancing Golden Eagle above a flock of soggy sheep in west Perthshire - through a sleet shower ! A small, dedicated band of raptor workers, amateurs and professionals, of all ages and backgrounds have been working away for years to the produce information that is becoming increasingly vital to the conservation of many birds of prey – sounds familiar? The final link was the addition of recent access problems and bureaucratic and organizational infighting – I felt quite at home! However, there are good reasons for optimism with the future of these eagles, perhaps in contrast to the plight of our own still persecuted Golden Eagles. The enthusiasm for conservation shown by teachers and pupils at schools in the communal lands around Matobos. Unlike the killing grounds of the west Grampians, the Monadhliadhs and other Scottish moorlands, these birds live in an area where man has no desire to destroy what is perhaps the most impressive symbol of the land.

The Matobo Hills have long been known for their rich diversity of raptor species, and can boast a total of 32 breeding species out of a total of 50 so far recorded in the area. The hills cover an area of Matabeleland south, approximately 100 km long by 30 km wide, the area being made up largely of granite formations, some being large domed inselbergs (or whalebacks), while other hills form large "jumbles" of rock with boulder strewn slopes running down into densely wooded gullies and vlei areas.

Of the many raptor species, the Black Eagle is undoubtedly the most studied. The species occurs here in a density found nowhere else, due to the abundance of nesting sites, and its staple prey, the Rock Hyrax and Yellow-spotted Hyrax. The Matobo Black Eagles have been the subject of study since 1963 and a monograph on the species written by Valerie Gargett was published in 1990. This survey has now entered its 36th year of formal study. Since 1984, the Black Eagle survey has focused mainly on the breeding of the Black Eagles within a 420 km^2 area, falling mainly in protected National Park and surrounding commercial farmland. Breeding success in this area has been monitored on a yearly basis and all data collected published in a year-end report. The importance of the continuation of this long term study has now become evident, as a 40% drop in the number of breeding pairs has been noticed over the past 20 years. The question has now arisen as to the reason for this decline. Is this a natural decline or has it been caused by another factor?

As the Black Eagle is a very visible species at the top of its food chain, it is an important bioindicator. If the Black Eagle has shown signs of decline, then it is a warning that all is not well in this ecosystem. The most likely reason for the Black Eagles' decline has been attributed to the devastating droughts of the past 2 decades, which caused a dramatic drop in Hyrax numbers. This in turn would have adversely affected the Black Eagle, which is almost wholly dependant on these animals as a food source (up to 98% of prey taken). Hyraxes have a gestation period of 7 months and are dependent on rainfall to produce regrowth of food source. Their ability to recover has been retarded, in degraded communal land. Another possible factor contributing towards a decline in numbers of breeding eagles could be related to the survival of immature birds. If fewer young birds are surviving then there would be less single adult birds available, 3°-4 years later, when these eagles should have reached maturity. In the 1970s an adult bird lost from a pair would be replaced within a few weeks, while in 1992, a single bird was observed holding territory for 9 months before being able to attract a mate.

In order to investigate further these factors, new projects were initiated in 1995. The first of these projects involved the radio tracking of immature Black Eagles in an attempt to understand better their movements after fledging. Nine radio transmitters were fixed by means of a harness to the backs of juveniles, a short while before fledging. From this, and data collected from other methods of marking, it has been ascertained that juveniles appear to use channels through the Matopos - grassy areas accommodating non-resident pairs which run roughly north-west to south-east. Young birds are forced into these areas by resident pairs which defend their territories. It now appears as though immature birds will leave the central area of the Matopos and be forced via these channels into less suitable areas such as communal land. Here there are fewer breeding pairs of eagles, but less food, and conflict with humans can occur when poultry, livestock and Hyraxes are taken as prey. A record of a ringed juvenile killed whilst taking poultry, has been made. Another factor is that juveniles are attracted to carrion, and 2 records exist of birds being caught in gin traps set for problem animals in farmland; these are however, not often used. The effect of power lines on juvenile survival are not yet known.

As the involvement of the local people who live in areas surrounding the National Park is of vital importance to the well being of the ecosystem, it was realised that this matter needed to be addressed. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, Ornithological Research Unit has taken on this task, and a motorcycle was acquired in order for a scout, Ngoni Chiweshe, to travel around these areas.

This project, which is ongoing, targets mainly primary and secondary schools, and to date thousands of children have been given an insight into conservation. Youngsters are encouraged to form wildlife clubs, and trips have been arranged for them to visit the nearby National Park to experience first hand what they have been taught. Chiefs and N'angas (traditional healers) are also consulted in order to understand better the

Black Eagle with chicks *Dave Dick*

situation in the communal areas. An important factor being investigated is the exploitation of the Hyrax (dassie) which is trapped extensively for its pelt as well as for its meat and is used to make curios and carosses. Hyrax numbers have dropped drastically in most communal areas around the park and in some areas none at all are seen, likewise the Black Eagle. It has been interesting to note that Goat fur is now used on curios previously made from dassie pelts and that carosses are hardly ever seen, due to the lack of available animals. (A single caross is made up of the pelts of as many as 80 dassies).

Hyraxes are monitored at sample sites in all areas. These sites are visited in April/May at sunrise, when basking animals are easily counted. This project is also ongoing and provides valuable data as to the status of the population, which has shown signs of an increase over the past few years.

Prey remains are also collected from below nests in all landuse categories. These remains are analysed and it has been found that communal land eagles are forced to expand their prey base and have become opportunists. Prey such as Plated Lizards and Tortoises as well as the odd domestic animal have been recorded.

Through sponsorship, generated by various donors to the newly formed Zimbabwe Raptor Research Group, the Black Eagle Survey has now expanded into a comprehensive study of the eagles, the Hyrax and the ecosystem. Team members are now active in monitoring Black Eagle and other raptor territories in the communal lands, as well as the areas where species such as the Lanner and Peregrine have taken over many of the derelict Black Eagle nest sites, and raptors such as the Augur Buzzard are thriving on the increased rodent population associated with human habitation. In addition, records of Black Eagle sightings and nests are collected on a national scale. A possible link with the Botswano population is being investigated, as juveniles from the Matopos may be able to reach the Limpopo, Soutpansberg and even the Magaliesberg via this route. Raptor research and conservation is alive and well in Zimbabwe!

Warren Goodwin PO Box AC 592, Ascot, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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REVIEWS

In Search of Birds in Wales *by Brian O'Shea. Published privately by Skylark Books. 2000. 147pp. ISBN 0-9538115-0-6. Obtainable from Skylark Books, Ty-Nant, Dyffryn, Llanilar, Aberystwyth SY23 4PF. £7.95 incl. p&p.*

A lively and accurate text describing birds in the Welsh countryside, in the style of Jim Flegg. Good background information for those with a general interest in the subject. There are some nice black and white illustrations, and some poor colour paintings.

Martin Collinson

Birds and Boys at Sedbergh: One Hundred Years of Watching and Recording Birds at Sedbergh School, Cumbria *by Ingram Cleasby. 1999. Available from the OS Secretary, The Bursary, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5RY. 149pp. £11.50 incl. Postage.*

This attractively produced book is a valuable source of information on the birds of this upland district of north-west England. The Ornithological Society of Sedbergh School has long had a reputation as a training ground for future ornithologists, including some who became active members of the SOC, notably Chris Mylne and Andrew Macmillan. The book contains a preface by Max Nicholson, another old Sedberghian. There are chapters on breeding birds, raptors, wildfowl and surveys. An example of the value of conducting surveys over a long time span is the Ring Ouzel, where it is shown that they have suffered a drastic decline since the 1960s. I was impressed by Andrew Macmillan's method of finding Meadow Pipit nests when time is limited to a few hours in the afternoon*. There is a useful status list of species in the Dedbergh area at the end of the book.

John Ballantyne

* 'It may be noted that although the nests open downhill, the best way to put the bird up under your feet when looking for nests is to run down the hill'. (p89)

Other books received

Isles of the West *by Ian Mitchell 1999. Canongate. ISBN 0-862410-878-X. £9.99*

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REQUESTS

Request for Redshank remains

As part of a study to estimate the relative proportions of Icelandic and Scottish Redshank overwintering on Scottish estuaries, I am looking for Redshank corpses for strontium isotope analysis. I hope to obtain latitudinally specific signals from the bones of Redshank thus allowing me to identify their race, but to do this I need a sample of Redshank corpses (raptor/roadkills) from the Scottish breeding population and the Scottish overwintering population. If any SOC members come across any Redshank remains on their travels (condition not important) I would be very grateful if they could contact me: **Rhys Bullman, Forth Estuary Ecology Group, Institute of Biological Sciences, University of Stirling. FK9 4LA (01786 467755 Ext: 7816) or email** rhys.bullman@stir.ac.uk

Edinburgh Swift survey

Please send in your records of Swifts in Edinburgh and the Lothians, especially screaming parties and nests, to **Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh EH21 6UW.** This survey is organised by the SOC in cooperation with the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership. Details can be found on SOC website (under surveys)

Ring Ouzel study group

Birders across the UK are being asked to look out for ringed Ring Ouzels this spring and summer, as part of an effort to discover more about this declining upland bird. Ring Ouzels in England and Scotland have been colour ringed during the last 2 years and birdwatchers are asked to report any sightings during migration, the breeding season, and particularly in late summer, since almost nothing is known about where Ring Ouzels spend the 8 weeks before southward migration. Colour combinations and locations (6 figure grid reference if possible) should be sent to **Ring Ouzel Study Group, c/o Julian Hughes, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL,** or e-mail **ringouzel@hotmail.com**

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

As part of a long term study of Aberdeen's roof nesting Oystercatchers, we are fitting the birds with Darvic rings on the left leg. These rings are white or yellow and bear a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits, eg A26, reading down the leg. We would be grateful for any sightings, even incomplete ones, and can provide a prompt history. Please inform either: **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS (01224 483717)** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Aberdeen AB23 8PP (01224 823184).**

Colour ringed Dunlin

Since 1997 we have been colour ringing breeding adult and pullus Dunlin at various locations in Orkney. All birds ringed as adults are identifiable as individuals. On the right leg there is a yellow colour ring above the knee, and two colour rings below the knee. The left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. The chicks also have a yellow colour ring above the knee on the right leg and the left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. Birds ringed as chicks are only identifiable as to the year in which they were ringed. Even if the combinations are incomplete, we would be grateful for all sightings of birds that have a YELLOW colour ring above the knee on the right leg. All sightings should be sent to either **Stuart Williams Crafty, Firth, Orkney KW17 2ES Tel: 0185676 1742 email Stuart@gavia.freeserve.co.uk, or Jim Williams, Fairholm, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EQ Tel: 0185676 1317** Acknowledgement will be sent along with full history of the bird.

Colour photos wanted

As you will see we have introduced colour into *SBN*. Unfortunately, most of the stock of photographs held in Regent Terrace is black and white, so perhaps some of you would like to donate good colour photographs which can then be used in our publications. As always, photographers are acknowledged.

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to: **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

SOC car stickers

Ian Andrews has designed a smart new car sticker featuring the Club's new logo. These can be purchased from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, at 50pence each plus a second class stamp.

North Sea Bird Club

To mark 21 years since the founding of the Club an Open Day will be held on Saturday 3 September at Culterty Field Station, Newburgh near Ellon Aberdeenshire. The field centre is adjacent to the Ythan estuary. There will be a short illustrated talk and displays covering the many records of birds, insects, cetaceans and other sea life that has been reported over 21 years. Feel free to drop in and have some refreshments and take the opportunity to look over the estuary. Further details can be obtained from **Andrew Thorpe, The Recorder on 01224-789631 or e-mail nsbc@abdn.ac.uk**

SOC NOTICES

Publications

As you will notice Stan da Prato has not edited this issue of SBN. Following our front page article in the last issue only one person has come forward to offer assistance with any of the publications. Unfortunately this has meant that this issue of SBN has had to be reduced to 12 pages. We would however like to thank Martin Collinson for his offer of help and thank him for taking on this issue at short notice. Members should note that unless further assistance is forthcoming soon future publications will have to be reduced in size or be published late.

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 2000 were:
January 1st £30 D Donnelly, Hamilton; 2nd £20 T Hartland, Peebles; 3rd £10 M MacIntyre, St. Andrews.
February 1st £30 P Slater, St. Andrews; 2nd £25 D Maciver, Stornoway; 3rd £20 M Gibson, Galashiels; 4th £10 Mrs J.Denney, Glasgow
March 1st £50 A Buckham, Galashiels; 2nd £30 N Stabler, Inveresk; 3rd £20 D Stark, Thurso; 4th £10 G Rennie, Carluke

All who rejoined on 1 June for the 200 Club's twelfth year are warmly thanked for their continued support, which is very gratefully acknowledged by Council. If you are not yet a member, and would like to join now, please contact me for further information. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896) 822176**

Scottish Birds Records Committee

Election of new member and change of address for SBRC Secretary

Since 1990 one member of SBRC has retired annually by rotation. Kevin Osborne is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Dr Roger Riddington. Roger was Warden on Fair Isle from 1994-1997 and now lives on Mainland, Shetland. He is primarily interested in migration during spring and autumn and seabirds during the summer. He has much experience of Scottish rare birds, having seen all of the species on the *SBRC List*, and we believe his knowledge would be an asset to our committee. Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31 August, signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be SOC members. If there is more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC Local Recorders will be eligible to vote. **Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ.**

Changes to recording network

North East Scotland

Andy Thorpe is now sole recorder for NE Scotland. His address is **30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen. Tel. 01224 733296.** Richard Schofield has taken over as Chair of the local rarities committee. His address is **89 Menzies Road, Aberdeen.**

Angus and Dundee

Dan Carmichael has taken over as recorder for Angus and Dundee. His address is **2a Reres Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 2QA.**

Isle of May

Iain English has taken over as recorder for the Isle of May. His address is **21 Grant Court, Avon Grove, Hamilton, South Lanarkshire ML3 7UT. Tel. 01698 891788.**

Retiring recorders, Andy Webb, Mike Nicoll and Ian Darling are all thanked for their invaluable contributions over the years.

Annual Conference 2000

This year's annual conference will be held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore, over the weekend 3/5 November. The full programme and booking form will be sent out with the September mailing.

2000/2001 Winter programme

Dates for the September meetings of Branches are as follows, Ayrshire& Dumfries - 20 Sept; Borders - 11 Sept; Caithness & Fife - 13 Sept; Grampian - 4 Sept; Highland - 12 Sept; Stewartry - 21 Sept; Stirling & Tayside - 14 Sept; West Galloway - 19 Sept.

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair, Vane Farm.

The SOC will again have a stand at this year's fair and offers of help over the weekend 2/3 September will be welcomed. Please contact **Sylvia at the SOC on 0131 556 6042** if you can help.

Nominations for Council

Nominations for 2 new council members are required to replace Derrick Warner and Ron Youngman. Nomination should be made in writing with a proposer and seconder and should be sent to **The Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT no later than 31 July 2000.**

The BTO Peregrine Appeal

It is now 10 years since the last Peregrine survey which showed that Peregrines were spreading into new habitats with numbers reaching an all-time high of 1,265 pairs. However, the 1991 survey showed worrying declines in the north and west of Scotland with numbers down by 25% since 1981. The reasons for these declines are unclear. Possible causes include accumulation of pollutants and a decline in fertility of the land, limiting prey numbers in moorland areas. The recently published *Report of the UK Raptor Working Group* has been well received and includes 25 recommendations agreed by conservationists, game interests and pigeon racing organisations. It stresses the need to investigate why the Peregrine population is declining in the Scottish Highlands. The SOC is joining forces with the BTO, Raptor Study Groups, RSPB and various conservation agencies to survey breeding Peregrines in the UK during 2001. Alan Lauder, Head of BTO Scotland will be co-ordinating the survey along with Derek Ratcliffe and Humphrey Crick. If you are a keen Peregrine fieldworker and would like to take part in the study, please contact your BTO Regional Representative or **Alan at BTO Scotland, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT. Tel 0131 558 8009.**

BTO - SOC Secretarial appointment

Further to the opening of the BTO's new Scottish Office, Helen Cameron took up her post as part time secretary on 4 April. Helen is also providing invaluable and much needed assistance in the SOC office on a part-time basis. Helen's keen interest in conservation and natural history stand her in good stead to provide valuable support to both organisations. Helen worked as a secretary before embarking on a degree in Botany. She has recently returned from Morocco where she was involved in a captive-breeding programme of Houbara Bustard.

We welcome Helen to the SOC.

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Recent Reports

April-June – a review of spring 2000

If there was one word that summed up east coast falls this spring it would be non-existent, whilst if there was one word that summed up arrival dates for common migrants it would be early eg a **Lesser Whitethroat** at Kilminning on the 22 April was the earliest ever in Fife. Rarities too were early, with a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** on Fair Isle on the 15 May the earliest ever recorded in Britain. A more typical June record followed on Fair Isle of a bird trapped on the 11th and still present the next day, whilst mainland Scotland's spring highlight occurred in the form of a singing bird present near Nigg Ferry (Highland) from the 7th. This superb find proved a real star with the bird, when singing early morning, sitting out in the open on an exposed perch on its chosen heavily vegetated slope, easily viewable to its many admirers on the beach below. It was also the long overdue first record of **Blyth's Reed Warbler** for mainland Scotland. Fair Isle though was the place to be this spring, with a second for Scotland occurring there in the shape of a **Dartford Warbler** on the 29 April-1 May. The previous Scottish record was at St. Abbs Head on the 18 May 1983. Also this year on Fair Isle, for the second year running, a **Calandra Lark** was seen on the 13 May, fourth record for Scotland, whilst also in May there a **Siberian Stonechat** was seen on the 16th. The only reports of **Short-toed Lark**, **Great Grey Shrike** and **Ortolan Bunting** were there with singles on the 25 May, 19-20 April and 15-17 May respectively. A **Red-rumped Swallow** was present there on the 11 May, presumably the same bird present on Shetland south mainland on the 8-10 and possibly the bird present on Orkney mainland on the 12th. Another was seen in Borders, at Hule Moss, on the 4 June. Half of the 10 **Subalpine Warblers** were seen on Fair Isle including one on the 20 April, the earliest ever on Shetland. Four of the remaining 5 were also on Shetland, the other being a singing male on the Isle of Eigg on the 29–30 April. A **Thrush Nightingale** was seen on Fair Isle on the 4 June whilst the only definite **Nightingale** was on Barra on the 3–6 May (fourth Outer Hebrides record). Elsewhere amongst scarcities 5 Hoopoes were seen between the 27April-29 May, only 6 **Wrynecks** were seen from the 30 April onwards (though including one in Ayrshire on the 7 May), only 8 **Turtle Doves** were noted and 35+ **Bluethroats** were reported from the 7 May, all **red-spotted** and mostly on Fair Isle, though only the second Renfrewshire record occurred in the form of a male at Muirshiel Country Park on the 21 May. The previous county record was a male **white-spotted** in 1996. A **Water Pipit** in Fife from the 18 March-9 April was surprisingly only the third county record. Four **Marsh Warblers** were seen on Shetland from the 31 May and **Icterine Warblers** were recorded from 13-31 May with only 11 seen, none of which were on the mainland. Only 5 migrant **Reed Warblers** were seen, though one of these, a bird on Fair Isle on the 15-16 June was trapped on its first day and was off the eastern race *fuscus*. Mirroring last year's **Desert Lesser Whitethroat** on Fair Isle in June, this form, known as **Caspian Reed Warbler**, is considered a full species by some authorities. A **Firecrest** was at Collieston (Aberdeenshire) on 24-28 April whilst perhaps showing up best amongst the scarcities, 36 **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen from the 27 May, with mainland Scotland records from Aberdeenshire and Borders. The only **Red-breasted Flycatcher** reported was a male on Hoy (Orkney) on the early date of 19 April. Seven **Golden Orioles** were seen including 2 in Highland in June, whilst a disappointing 11 **Common Rosefinches** were seen from the 26 May including 2 in Borders and 3 in Highland. There was a significant influx of **Hawfinches** in mid-April, with 35 migrants noted in the whole period. Typical June rarities occurred in the form of the 3 **Black-headed Buntings** reported between the 8-18th and the 3 or 4 **Rose-coloured Starlings** seen from the 8th.

If the passerine rarities and scarcities were, on the whole, disappointing it was quite a good spring for herons and their allies. Two or 3 **Great White Egrets** were seen with 2 reports from Tiree on the 18 May and 18 June (fourth - fifth Argyll records if accepted as different) and one at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on the 7 June (fourth Aberdeenshire record). Five **Little Egrets** were reported from 28 April, a **Purple Heron** was reported at Ardmore Point (Dunbartonshire) on the 1 May and 2 **Bitterns** were reported, from Papa Westray on the 3 May (only the third Orkney record) and Rattray Head (Aberdeenshire) on the 16 May. A **Black Stork** was reported from Mull on the 16 May (first record for Argyll if accepted) whilst 4 **White Storks** were reported – 2 flyovers in April in Angus and Perthshire, an elusive individual on Speyside from 14 May-7 June and one near Fraserburgh on the 19 May. There was a superb showing by **Common Crane** with at least 20 seen throughout the period. There was a similarly good showing by **White-billed Diver** with no fewer than 6 reported from the 6 April whilst a **Pied-billed Grebe** at Loch Osgaig on 24-25 April is the first record for Highland and eighth for Scotland.

Around 65 **Garganey** were seen in the period, with 7 at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve in May the largest count. Amongst raptors the highlights included a **Black Kite** reported over Banchory on the 28 April (third Aberdeenshire record if accepted) and the 3 **Montagu's Harriers** seen between the 15-18 May in Lothian, Aberdeenshire and on the Outer Hebrides. The 2 reports of **Snowy Owl** from North and South Uist in May confirm the Outer Hebrides as the place now to try and see this species in Britain, whilst the long staying **Greater Yellowlegs** on Benbecula was finally last seen on the 7 May. The undoubted wader highlight in Scottish terms was the **Stone Curlew** at Inver (Highland) from the 18-22 May. Two **Broad-billed Sandpipers** were seen, on the Ythan Estuary from 3-6 May (earliest ever Scottish record) and at the Endrick Mouth on the 16-17 May (first record for the Clyde area). American waders showed up in the form of **Pectoral Sandpipers** at WWT Caerlaverock on 28 April-9 May and on Islay on the 11 May, and a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on Fetlar on 30 May. A typical scattering of migrant Dotterel were reported, but disappointingly, only 3 **Little Ringed Plovers** were seen.

The **Long-tailed and Pomarine Skua** passage was comparatively disappointing this year with the best numbers past North Uist on the 17-23 when 12 **Long-taileds** and 163 **Pomarines** were seen whilst 41 **Long-taileds** and 11 **Pomarines** passed Wats Ness, Shetland on the 18th with 11 further **Pomarines** off there the next day. Three **White-winged Black Terns** were reported in June, at Carnbee Reservoir on the 5-7th (third Fife record), on North Uist on the 8-14th (third Outer Hebrides record and first for 33 years) and off Fetlar on the 19th whilst amazingly no **Black Terns** were seen in Scotland this spring.

In April there were record counts of **Black-tailed Godwit** in both Lothian and Borders, 59 at Musselburgh on 25th and 26 near Bemersyde on 26th respectively whilst 31 **Common Scoter** off West Ferry on 24 April was a Renfrewshire record count.

Angus Murray

1st year Sub Alpine Warbler near plantation on Fair Isle *Hywel Maggs*

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Scottish Bird News

Edited by
Martin Collinson
Assisted by
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Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 64th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

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Spoonbills Create a Stir

Mersehead RSPB Reserve had its first ever record of Spoonbill on 21 June, when an adult bird in full summer plumage graced the wetland, staying until 25 June. To our amazement another 2 adult birds in summer plumage turned up on the wetland on 4 July, but little did we know how much of a stir these birds would create in the birding world over the ensuing weeks !

The first date

For the first few days of their stay at Mersehead, the 2 birds behaved as most visiting Spoonbills do, roosting and only occasionally feeding for much of the daylight hours, with increased feeding activity at dusk and dawn. During this time it was noticed that one of the birds had a yellow darvic ring on its right leg, and although the inscription was indecipherable to begin with, the colour of the ring was sufficient to pin down its origins to the Netherlands, the location of the nearest breeding colony of Spoonbills to Scotland.

After about 4 days, the behaviour of the Spoonbills began to change. They spent more time feeding and preening during the day and there were the first signs of courtship display, confirming that the 2 birds were indeed a pair.

Courtship

Over their first weekend on the Reserve, the courtship displays intensified and became more elaborate, with the birds mutually preening, bill clapping/fencing and most spectacularly of all, synchronised flying! It was during this time that the pair retreated towards the back of the wetland fields, near the Beck Burn and started to stand on rush clumps during their displaying. Soon the birds were flattening a particularly large clump of rushes and fashioning a nesting platform, by delicately pulling the strands of rush over from the perimeter to the centre of the clump. They were never without enthralled spectators, be it human visitors watching from the hide or the group of Grey Herons which stood around them almost all of the time. Unfortunately the Grey Herons became increasingly aggressive towards the Spoonbills and may have been the reason why the birds did not progress to the egg-laying stage, although on the day that they temporarily left the Reserve (absent between 15-17 July), the presumed female seemed to be sitting on their favoured rush clump. During their absence, examination of all 4 of the nesting platforms built, showed no evidence of any egg-laying activity.

Spoonbills in flight *Craig White*

New arrival!

Much to our surprise, the Spoonbill story was not over, with the pair returning to Mersehead on 18 July and being joined by an adult Little Egret on 20 July. However, since this date they have not necessarily stayed on the wetland all day, probably going off to feed somewhere on the Solway, although their daytime location has never been identified.

The arrival of the Spoonbills and their subsequent courtship displays and nesting attempt certainly captured everyone's imagination, with over 3,400 visitors to the Reserve in July and press coverage on Border ITV, Radio stations 3, 4 and 5 and many column inches in national and local newspapers.

Although Spoonbills have been seen copulating in Scotland within the last decade, it is thought that this is the first time that they have made a nesting attempt.

At the time of writing, 8 August, they are still present at Mersehead RSPB Reserve, engaging in brief courtship displays and often roosting on the nest platforms, but it is obvious the nesting attempt is over......for this year?!

Stop Press: The yellow darvic ring on one of the Spoonbills has finally been seen as 3Z. Watch out in a future SBN for an update on the Spoonbills exact origins!

Dave Fairlamb

Lapwing (see breeding report on page 8-9) *Fred Westcott* b

2000

July 2000 was a glorious day as I was met at Keflavik Airport by Arnonr Sigfusson of the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. I had been invited once again to Iceland to participate in the final year of the institutes 5 year Grey Goose study. The aim as usual was to catch and mark Greylag Geese during the first week and the Pink-footed during the second week. Most of the Greylags marked so far have been in Eastern Iceland, the plan this year was to try and mark a sample in the north of Iceland.

After a day of shopping, sorting our equipment, packing vehicles we were off to the north. We were to be based in a very well equipped community hall at Hunaver, a small agricultural community, at the head of Langadalur in Austru-Hunavatnssysla. Hunaver was situated between 2 large 'straths' both with good populations of breeding geese, so proved to be and ideal central location.

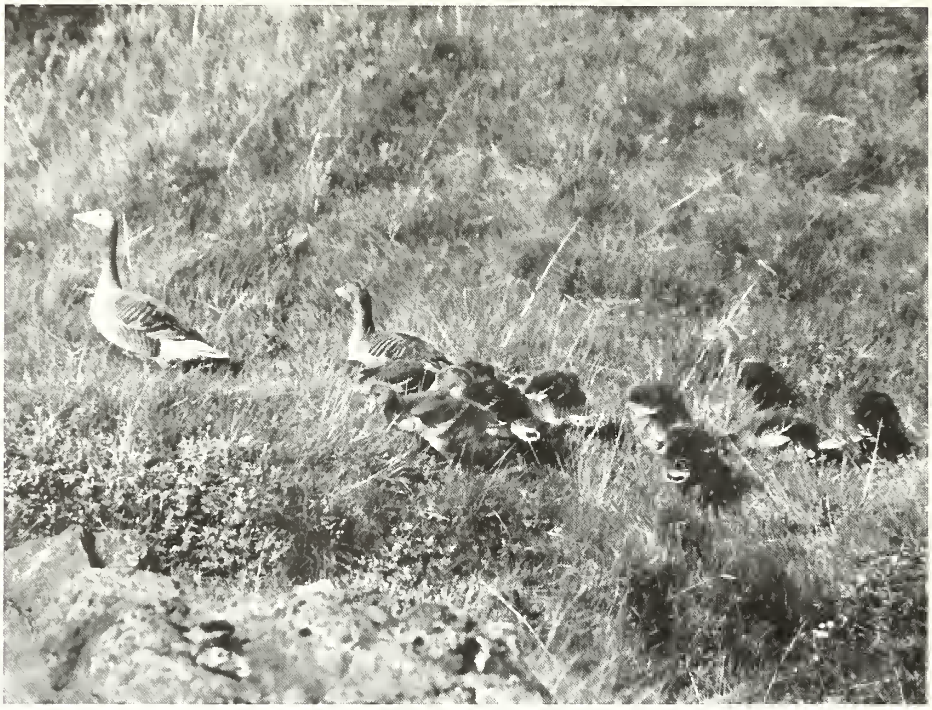
Locating the goose flocks

The first day in the north was spent recceing to try and locate where the goose flocks were feeding and which ones might be catchable. It also was an opportunity to see the area and its rich bird life. In the good weather the farmers were busy cutting hay. There are hayfields everywhere, mostly on the valley bottoms but even on islands in rivers and half way up hillsides. They were full of waders, especially Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Redshank, Snipe and Black-tailed Godwit. We watched an Arctic Skua catch a recently fledged young Redshank which it then proceeded to pluck alive! Mother nature at its cruellest. The massive expansion in the number of hayfields in these areas over the last 30 years must have also greatly benefited the geese, which use them in spring and autumn. Roadside ditches and pools held broods of Mallard, Teal and Wigeon, whilst Tufted Duck, Scaup, Whooper Swans and Slavonian Grebes were present on the larger lakes. On the more vegetated parts of the wider river flood plains were lots of families of geese.

Planning tactics

Over the next few days we targeted different goose flocks. In Langadalur and neighbouring Skagafjördur it was just a case of using the 4X4 vehicles to drive as close as possible to the flocks and then chase them, catching the flightless birds in large hand nets. The Langadalur birds were more approachable than those eastern Iceland. This was probably due to the fact that the river was an important salmon fishing river and the geese were used to the fisherman driving up and down the flood plain. On one occasion in Skagafjördur we had superb views of a large female Gyr Falcon hunting across the flood plain. It flew into the strong headwind, rising up and hovering briefly as it craned its long neck searching the marsh below for young goslings or waders - an impressive bird.

For the larger flocks we needed a different technique. We used corrals made out of nets. At Flódid, a very shallow lake just south of Blondous, we located a flock of 200 Greylags along with 90 moulting Whooper Swans and a Great Northern Diver. We set up a corral on the shore, with a 200m lead arm jutting out into the lake. We moved the flock into the water, then sent people out to wade across the lake (it was only knee deep) to guide the flock towards the nets. It was very successful – we caught 177. We also used a similar technique at Blondous itself. Here a large flock of Greylags feeding on the river estuary close to the town were fairly used to people. We managed to get between the geese and the river and ease them up into a corral. Another large catch of 118, only 4 fliers escaped.



Greylag Goose family at Blondous *Bob Swann*

In all we had caught 358 Greylags in the first week. A great success. Traditionally in Iceland the Greylag breeds on the lowlands and the Pinkfoot in the highlands. As the Pinkfoot population has grown over the last 20 years or so birds have moved down and started to colonise some of these northern 'straths' so that are now breeding close to Greylags. We located some of these flocks in Skagafjördur and managed to catch 125. These are the first lowland Pinks to be marked in Iceland and it will be interesting to compare their survival rates with the upland birds.

Heading for the interior

Week 2 and we headed up into the interior on another hot, glorious sunny day. Our destination Eyvindarstadaheida an upland area lying to the north of the Hofsjökull icecap. This is an area where Pinkfeet had been caught in 1996 and 1997. On the way up we saw and caught two female Harlequin ducks. They were colour ringed as part of a project in Iceland on this species. These uplands had high densities of Golden Plover, Dunlin and Ptarmigan. We stayed in a remote bothy, which we shared with some Icelandic farmers who were driving their ponies to high summer pastures. They were in good form and a ceilidh was soon in full swing where, amongst other songs, we had renditions of both *Ten green bottles* and *Auld Lang Syne* simultaneously in English and Icelandic.

Catching Pinkfeet

The following morning saw a later than usual start! Pinkfoot are caught by using low ridges to try and surround a marsh and then, at a given time, everyone walks towards a low hill in the marsh. The geese when disturbed tend to head for these hills walk up them and look around to see what is going on. You never actually know till you get up on the hill many birds you've got. Once there you surround the birds, whilst a corral is hastily built and the geese driven into it. On this occasion we were amazed to see we had caught 454 birds (almost double what had been previously caught at this site). It took us three hours to process them before releasing them altogether so that the families could regroup (which they do surprisingly quickly). As we were processing them we noticed some activity on a neighbouring hill top. An adult Arctic Fox had arrived back at its den and had enticed the 4 large cubs out. As we processed the geese they kept us entertained as they gambled about and fought with each other. Before we left we went over to examine the den. It was covered in the remains of goslings and a few adult geese. Many of the goslings were uneaten. Possibly to be stored for the winter? The cubs growled underneath as we walked over their den. A magic experience.

Heading for Pjorsarver

The next day we headed south, passed the hot springs at Hveravellir, then along a tortuous 4X4 track through boulder fields, lava flows and across meltwater river 'til we reached our final destination at Pjorsarver to the south of Hofsjokull. This was where Peter Scott had large catches of Pinkfeet in 1951 and 1953 and where we had caught over 1000 birds in 1999. The idea was to repeat our 1999 catches in order to mark more birds and see how many of last year's birds we could retrap. The weather was a lot cooler than last year, but this had one major advantage, the meltwater streams were a lot lower and easier to wade across. The procedure as the same as last year surround a marsh and at a given time move in towards a low hill. The marshes are full of geese, but not a lot else. A few waders, including Purple Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalarope, the odd Snow Bunting but a pair of Gyr Falcons livened up many of the long trecks. In all, in 3 days, we had 3 catches totalling 753 new birds, but only 20 retraps from last year, probably an indication of the huge numbers of geese that breed in this area. This brought the grand total of Pinkfeet caught during the entire trip to 1378.

All the geese caught were ringed and most were marked with either plastic ring or grey neck collar. This means with the large numbers marked last year and the additional birds marked by the Highland Ringing Group at Loch Eye there will be a lot of marked birds to look out for in flocks in Scotland this winter. These sightings are very important. The aim is to use them to work out and compare survival rates between Greylags, upland Pinkfeet and lowland Pinkfeet. At present the Icelandic population of Greylags is in decline. This appears to be due to unsustainable commercial shooting in Iceland. The information from this study can be used by the Icelandic Institute of Natural History to advise the Icelandic government to put restrictions on commercial shooting of Greylags in Iceland to make the harvest more sustainable. All records are valuable. Letters on collars and leg rings should be read from the bottom up. Sightings should be sent to me **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain. IV19 1JR. Tel: 01862 894329. Email: Bob.Swann@hcs.uhi.ac.uk** and these will be acknowledged and ringing details and details of any subsequent sightings will be sent to each observer.

Finally I am indebted to the SOC endowment fund for a grant towards the cost of my travel expenses to Iceland and I would like to thank all the Icelanders I met for their kindness, hospitality and good company.

Bob Swann

Pinkfeet Geese being rounded *Bob Swann*

Charles Frank

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The BOU

The British Ornithologists' Union is one of the world's oldest ornithological societies, and it main function is to 'promote ornithology within the scientific and birdwatching communities'. This is achieved primarily by the BOU's quarterly journal *Ibis* and is one of the world's leading journals which includes original research reports on the systematic, ecology, physiology, behaviour, anatomy and conservation of birds. The BOU also organises conferences, seminars, meetings and expeditions and awards grants annually to assist with travel and equipment associated with ornithological research projects and student sponsorship.

The British list

For over 100 years the BOU has maintained a list of birds that have been recorded in Britain. This is undertaken by the BOU's Records Committee (BOURC), which periodically publishes up-to-date checklists incorporating changes, these are published annually in *Ibis*.

In 1997 the BOURC liaised with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to revise the categories used in the British List. The JNCC has adopted the list for decisions concerning the status of birds in Britain in relation to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Responsibility for the British list lies with the BOURC. The Northern Ireland Birdwatching Association (NIBA) maintains the list for Northern Ireland, which has different legislation. The Isle of Man also maintains its own list. Species recorded from the Republic of Ireland do not form part of the British List.

The role of the BOURC

Records of birds new to Britain are passed to the BOURC by the British Rarities Committee (BBRC) after they have examined them. The BOURC prepares a file summarising the record, this file also contains original descriptions and supporting documentation, including BBRC comments, correspondence from independent specialists, an analysis of the captive status of the species and its escape likelihood and extracts from books and journals referring to migration and vagrancy patterns. Records are circulated by post and require unanimous agreement on identification and at least a two-thirds majority on categorisation.

The committee also studies taxonomic advances and initiates research into this field. Information on feral populations is monitored, and reviews are undertaken of older records. Anyone can ask for old or rejected records to be reviewed by the BOURC if they provide fresh evidence to justify re-examination. This is time consuming work, particularly when it involves detailed research or discussions with experts.

Publication of BOURC decisions

The BOURC publishes regular reports in *Ibis*. As few birders regularly see *Ibis*, information is press-released to the main birding magazines, who also receive pre-publication copies of *Ibis* reports. The magazines use some of this information as the basis for news items or articles, but much of the BOURC's work goes unreported. BOURC members occasionally write longer papers on species reviews and decisions for publication in the birding magazines. Decisions are notified to appropriate recorders and original observers.

The BOURC commitment

The BOURC undertakes;

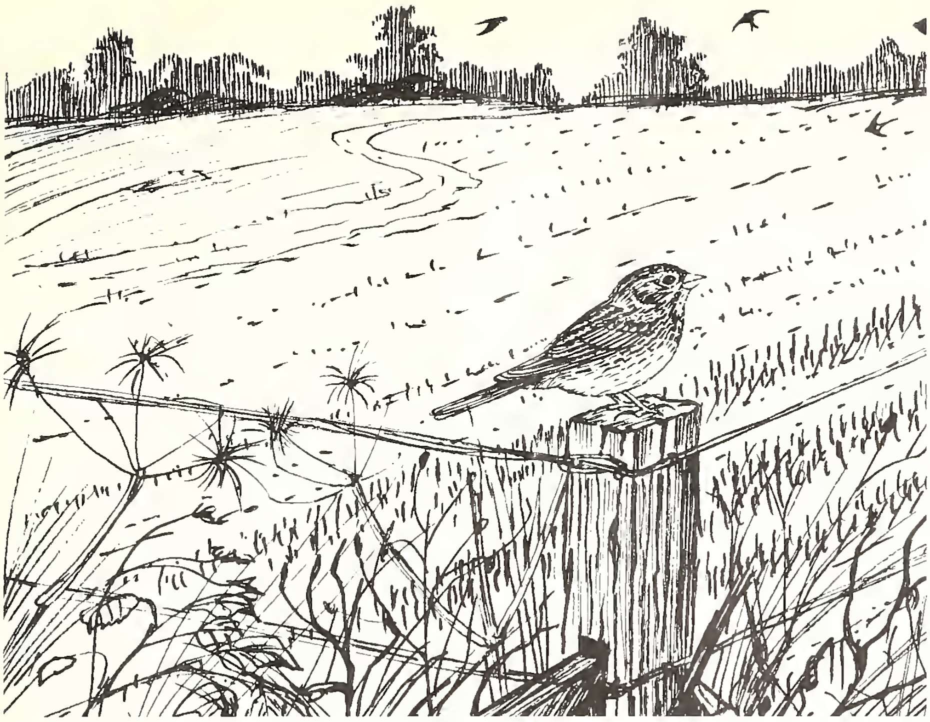
- To maintain the scientific accuracy and integrity of the BOU list of British birds by admitting only those species and subspecies that have been identified beyond reasonable doubt, and whose origin is considered to be in accordance with the relevant BOURC categories
- To ensure that all the evidence for identification and the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of potential new species or subspecies are examined thoroughly, fairly and objectively, calling upon external expert opinion where appropriate.
- To ensure that any new evidence which is submitted, or which comes to light, that might affect the identification or categorisation of any existing record is reviewed thoroughly, fairly and objectively.
- To ensure that all records are dealt with as speedily as practicable, but not so that this in any way prejudices the need for thorough and comprehensive examination of the evidence.
- To attempt to answer any questions about it decisions fully and fairly, stating the reasons for these decisions.
- So far as is practicable, to consult with the observers where new evident suggest that a record might no longer be acceptable. The view of the observers will be taken into consideration in any final decision.

The current members are Tony Marr (Chairman), Tim Melling (Secretary), Colin Bradshaw (BBRC Chairman), Paul Harvey, Alan Knox, Ian Lewington, Eric Meek, Tony Prater, and Roger Wilkinson. Ken Shaw retired in April and Alan Knox is due to retire in 2001.

Wildlife photographer convicted of egg theft

Liverpool Magistrates Court convicted Dennis Green, a well known wildlife photographer, in June of this year. He was found guilty of 13 charges of illegally possessing eggs, stuffed birds and equipment to commit offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Considering that Mr Green abused his position of trust, and his convictions included the robbing of at least 2 Osprey nests from Scotland, it was disappointing that he received a conditional discharge. As Dave Dick, RSPB Scotland Senior Investigations Officer, stated 'In order for the general public to take wildlife crime seriously, courts have to be consistent in their sentencing.' Mr Green's case is only one of many that have been brought to the attention of the courts this year. Surely the time has come for the toughening of sentences in relation to wildlife crime, and for the law to be changed to allow the courts the option of custodial sentences for such crimes against our wildlife.

Golden Eagle with chick *Brian Turner*



Corn Bunting *Mike Ashley*

GM seed

In May the RSPB discovered that genetically modified oilseed rape had been planted at 7 sites in Orkney. The RSPB has been running schemes, in conjunction with farmers, to plant crops which are highly beneficial to birds at 11 key sites including land owned by the RSPB at Durkadale. The scheme involved distributing seeds to farmers for planting in order to provide food the birds during the winter. RSPB now plan to plough in all of these crops to try and ensure that pollen and seed is not passed on. All unplanted seed is to be destroyed.

Concern over the environmental impact of GM crops has led to the RSPB sitting on a scientific steering committee which overseas farm trials. Dr Martin Auld, the East Scotland Regional Manager for the RSPB, said: 'We are shocked and angry that we have been supplied with genetically modified seed. We have decided to take a highly precautionary approach in this matter and the project cannot continue. We are enormously saddened that this mistake has resulted in us having to plough up crops that birds need to survive the next winter.'

Decline of Corncrake in Lewis

A census conducted last year by RSPB Scotland found that Corncrakes in Lewis had declined to their lowest level in over 10 years. The reasons for this dramatic decline are not fully understood but may be partly due to a reduction in the amount of early cover available during May. The Corncrake is a ground nesting bird that depends on plenty of cover for breeding. It most commonly reveals itself by its distinctive crek crek call, and can be heard singing at dawn, dusk and most insistently between midnight and 3 am. The RSPB would like anyone who has records of calling Corncrakes in Lewis or Harris for this year to contact **Alison Rothwell Tel: 01851 672490**. Or **Peigi-Mairi Nicholson Tel: 01851 820546.** Payments may be available, under the Corncrake Initiative, to landowners who support 'Corncrake friendly' grassland management, and are prepared to cut the crop after 31 July in a Corncrake friendly way. A Corncrake Newsletter, produced annually by the RSPB on behalf of the Biodiversity Group gives details on the results of the census and active management for Corncrakes throughout Scotland. Free copies are available from Alison Rothwell.

Rat poisoning suspected as young Kites die

Until 10 years ago Red Kites were extinct in Scotland and only returned thanks to a reintroduction programme carried out jointly by SNH and the RSPB. Last year 34 breeding pairs were located in Scotland; 30 of them were in the Highlands. This year was a record breaking year with an unprecedented 39 pairs of Red Kites laying eggs in Scotland and a total of 84 chicks fledging. This was a significant increase on last year's figures, a true testimony to the many people who have assisted with the project. This summer the North Kessock Tourist Information Centre, on the Black Isle, 1 mile north of Inverness, was receiving live pictures from one of these nests. An RSPB Scotland Information Warden was on hand at the Centre to interpret the pictures and provide information about the Kites and to promote the spectacular wildlife of the Highlands in general.

Sadly, this summer saw the needless death of a brood of 2 young Red Kites. Local RSPB staff found the 5-week-old chicks in a nest in the outskirts of Muir of Ord (Ross-shire). They were in a weak condition, coughing up blood and their bodies were covered in blood, which was leaking from their feathers. These signs are consistent with poisoning from an anti-coagulant rodenticide. Attempts to save the young birds by local veterinary staff were in vain and they died in convulsions. It is likely that the chicks died accidentally after they were fed poisoned rats by their parents.

Following this incident, RSPB Scotland is urging anyone who lives in areas where Kites nest not to use rodenticides at this time of year. If this is not possible, then it would be a great help if the following precautions were adhered to:

1. If possible, use warfarin rather than an anti-coagulant rodenticide.
2. Carefully follow the instructions accompanying any poison used.
3. Collect and bury/incinerate all rats and mice which are killed.
4. Ensure that none of the rodenticide can reach an external source.

Red Kites are particularly prone to poisoning because they are efficient scavengers, often foraging close to farm buildings where rodenticides are commonly used. There is no evidence that rats in the north of Scotland have developed an immunity to warfarin. The use of warfarin poses much less of a threat to Red Kites than the use of anti-coagulant rodenticides that are 100-600 times more toxic.

British Trust for Ornithology – Peregrine Appeal Update

As you saw in the last issue of *SBN*, and the flyer included, BTO Scotland is running a Peregrine Appeal in order to fund the 2001 National Peregrine Survey. So far they have raised £19,215. Many thanks to those who have contributed. However, they desperately need to raise £32,000 alongside money already raised in order to run the survey and carry out the subsequent analysis. Any further donations at this time, would be gratefully received. Please send donations to **BTO Scotland, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. EH7 5BT**.

Colour photos URGENTLY required

As you will see we have introduced colour into *SBN*. If you would like to see your photographs grace future SBN's please send your slides or prints - or copy them onto a CD/Zip disc - to Sylvia at **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.** As always, photographers will be acknowledged. . We look forward to receiving some soon.

Eigg trip - May 2000

Highland Branch members enjoyed a short trip to Eigg in May 2000. The weather gods smiled this time and 18 of us met on the pier at Arisaig on a lovely sunny spring morning. There were several other passengers on the *Shearwater*, including a band - more of them later.

Out in the open sea, we saw Cormorants, Guillemots, Razorbills, a Puffin and a large raft of Manx Shearwaters drifting ahead of us. The shearwaters took off and swirled round effortlessly, skimming over the waves before settling down again on the sea, waiting to head back to their burrows at dusk. This is always a lovely sight and one which is not all that common between Arisaig and Eigg - usually they hang around Rum. As we approached the pier on Eigg, Eiders, mostly male, were cooing away and a Red-throated Diver, Black Guillemots and an Arctic Tern were seen.

We were staying at the Glebe Barn, and most of us walked the mile or so round the bay and up the hill to get there. It was wonderful to listen to the Skylarks, Song Thrushes, Wrens, Willow Warblers, Chaffinches and Cuckoos. We had our picnic lunch and set off towards the Sgurr of Eigg - a volcanic plug rising to 393 m at the west end of the island. It is a very distinctive landmark, and most of us wanted to climb it. The views were magnificent, with the hills of Skye and Rum to the north and the Ardnamurchan peninsula to the south. Red Grouse, a Peregrine and a Great Skua were added to the list but, to the 13 of us that climbed to the top, it was the view, the wonderful wild flowers and the amazing rock formations that stood out in our minds. We got back to the Glebe about 7 pm and cooked tea. Afterwards, while most people relaxed in the lounge, 5 of us headed back down to the pier café ceilidh to listen to the band that had come over on the boat with us. We met John Chester, the SWT representative on the island, and arranged to meet him in the morning.

Shorts and t-shirts again next day, on a glorious morning. John came and we set off across the island, heading for Laig Bay. En route we had wonderful views of Willow Warblers, Whitethroats and Whinchats. We took a wee path to the left through the most marvellous wildflower meadows - Primroses, Bluebells, Orchids, Tormentil, Daisies, Buttercups, curling fronds of Bracken and lots more. A pair of Twite sat on the fence beside the beach, several Brown Trout glided in and out of the shadows of the burn, Ringed Plover ran around the shore and a Grey Wagtail flitted at the mouth of the burn - idyllic! We sat on the beach eating an early lunch and watching a Great Northern Diver in superb plumage, 2 Red-throated Divers, Shags, Black Guillemots, Oystercatchers, Common Sandpipers and Swallows.

We headed inland to a good reedbed and were rewarded with super views of Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings, while a few saw Snipe. Seven of us set off up the very steep slope to the top of the cliffs. Marvellous views again on top, and a Kestrel appeared from the other side before gliding off. The flowers were out of this world: Mountain Avens, Pyramidal Bugle, Wild Strawberries, Lousewort, Cuckoo Flower and Globeflower to name a few. Away high on the clifftop, where Manx Shearwaters have their burrows, it was like an alpine garden. John took us past a Raven's nest with 5 large chicks almost ready to fly, before heading down a steep gully to the road. By this time we were going to be late for dinner, so we hurried back.

After a wonderful meal, John and a friend joined us for another impromptu ceilidh. We meandered back to the barn as Woodcock patrolled their territories, for a good blether and a few laughs before retiring to bed, exhausted but happy.

The next day was not such good weather - a few clouds around! We got good views of the Wood Warbler below the barn, hearing Chiffchaff and Blackcap. It was a wonderful wood, full of flowers and birdsong. Down at the shore, we saw Red-breasted Mergansers, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a Curlew and a Cormorant diving in a foot of water. We met John at the pier and headed towards the lodge with its neglected garden full of exotic plants such as the Chile Flame Tree. A Spotted Flycatcher flitted among the treetops and a pair of Bullfinches showed off in the sun. Some of us then set off for the caves to the west of the pier. We scrambled into the 'Massacre Cave' - 400 people were murdered there when they hid from their enemies from Skye, who lit a huge fire and smothered all those in the cave.

We met up with the rest of the party at the pier, said a last goodbye to John and clambered aboard. We arrived back in Arisaig a little tired but absolutely delighted with a wonderful bird watching and flower spotting weekend. We saw 76 species of bird - well done to everyone. We can certainly recommend the island and Glebe Barn to anyone who wants to visit Eigg.

Janet Crummy

Manx Shearwater *Don Smith*

Bird Challenge 2000

Tree Sparrow *Steven Brown*

Business sites present some excellent birdwatching opportunities. To prove this point, the BTO has teamed up with Tarmac to find the company sites richest in birdlife. During the course of the year, birdwatchers will record the birds seen on commercial sites across the United Kingdom, varying from printing works to a North Sea gas terminal.

This *Bird Challenge* aims to encourage firms to promote biodiversity on business and industrial sites and to recognise firms which make sites more attractive to birds.

There are 4 Scottish sites competing in the 2000 Challenge, at St Fergus, on Islay, in Dumfries and Galloway, and in Lothian.

The 2 inland sites, the Melville Landfill Site and Craignair Quarry both belong to the sponsors, Tarmac. Melville, part of the new Environmental Services division started the year well, noting species such as Buzzard, Goldeneye, Grey Partridge (a species of conservation concern) and several pairs of Skylark. Craignair Quarry has breeding Peregrines, Raven and over 20 resident passerine species.

Staff at Total Fina's St Fergus Gas Terminal have been working with St Fergus Primary School, together with the Buchan Countryside Group to establish a wildlife garden. Pupils were involved from the planning stage through to tree planting. Breeding birds on the terminal site include Fulmar, Ringed Plover, Lapwing and Tree Sparrow. Up to 50 of these declining farm bird were present on the site.

Ardbeg Distillery on Islay joined the Challenge late but aroused much interest. Several staff from Thetford consider it essential to carry out a field visit!

The BTO Business Sites Challenge recognises the fact that some businesses are already saving corners of their sites for birds and encourages more so to do. The Challenge happens every 2 years. A report on the year 2000 will be produced for the awards ceremony next summer.

Graham Appleton

Choughs and cow pats

The Islay RSPB Newsletter for Summer 2000 reports on a new study to investigate the long-term effects of broad-band insecticides such as avermectins on the arthropods which develop in cow pats and sheep dung. For a young Chough, a cow pat is the equivalent of the Corner Shop, and these are one of their most important food sources through the winter.

Some of the cattle at Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve have been dosed with avermectin, and some not. Cow pats from known cows will be marked and core samples taken at different stages to record the grubs and wigglies within. The project is likely to form the basis of a PhD study and has wider implications than the impact on Choughs. Many other species benefit from cow pats, not least the insects which inhabit them, many insect-eating birds such as Swallows, and some bat species also rely on insects in cattle-grazed pasture.

Water Rail dumped on

A decision was made by Scottish ministers in July this year to give the go-ahead for North Ayrshire Council to dump a million tonnes of waste on Bogside, a sensitive nature conservation area near Irvine. The development of the 133 hectare 'landraise' site will destroy the wetland habitat where a nationally important population of Water Rail is to be found and will also disturb Otters and Water Voles through the destruction of their habitat. The proposed site forms part of a network of nationally and locally protected areas and holds the only significant area of estuarine habitat between the Solway and the Clyde, providing habitats for wintering and breeding birds and is a staging area for migratory species. The operation of the 'landraise' in this area will result in the adjacent SSSI being subject to disturbance by humans and vehicles with associated Rats, Foxes, gulls and other predators. RSPB Scotland has condemned this decision and has urged the Council to consider all possible alternatives.

Chough *Martin Withers*

Merlin conjured up on screen

RSPB Scotland succeeded in bringing a little bit of magic into the lives of visitors to their Nature Reserve at Forsinard in Sutherland. The Merlin, Europe's smallest falcon, is thought to be declining in numbers in the UK, but visitors to the Peatland Visitor Centre were able to watch live pictures of a Merlin's nest. Information Wardens were on hand to interpret the pictures as well as promote the spectacular wildlife and other facilities that Sutherland and Caithness has to offer. The clutch of 3 eggs started to hatch on the 3 July, with the chicks remaining in the nest of a further 3 weeks. The facility at Forsinard guaranteed spectacular live pictures of this beautiful but elusive bird and its young without disturbing them – well worth a visit next breeding season!

World's first Sea Eagle viewing project - the Aros Centre

A Sea Eagle viewing project has been developed by a local partnership of Aros (Isle of Skye) Ltd., RSPB Scotland, SNH, The Highland Council and Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise. The project is also supported by Forest Enterprise, a local landowner and a Crofting Township. The overall cost of establishing the project was approximately £30,000 and has included the appointment by RSPB Scotland of a new seasonal Information Warden who is based at the Aros Centre.

Cailean Maclean, one of the Directors of Aros (Isle of Skye) Ltd said: 'We are thrilled to be able to host this unique facililty. Skye is the ancestral home of Sea Eagles in Scotland and it therefore seems fitting that the island has been able to secure this.'

A review of the 2000 breeding season

As usual this article is put together at very short notice and relies on the first impressions of some members; it is not a definitive account. Generally speaking 2000 was the third successive poor breeding season for many birds and is now beginning to have an effect on some species notably tits, Grey Wagtail, waders and some finches especially Linnet and Redpoll. Black-headed Gulls are now almost extinct in Ross and Sutherland. Drought conditions on Coll have had an effect on many birds which regularly nest on the machair. Summer migrants appeared to be slightly later in arriving in many areas and once again cold, wet unsettled weather in E Ross reduced breeding success for many species.

Eider

The weather

A number of contributors to this article commented on the reasonably good weather in late April to early May and then the very cold, wet spell from late May to mid June. The severe gales on 13 June affected many parts of Scotland and some seabird colonies lost most of their young birds.

Waders and water birds

Many waders and water birds appeared to have mixed fortunes over the 2000 breeding season with some areas particularly the Western Isles and Orkney reporting a good breeding season. In Caithness first clutches mostly failed with re-lays more successful, particularly of Lapwing. A site in Ayrshire which held 20 pairs of Lapwing reported that all the young perished during the dry hot weather in May and in Dumfriesshire a decline in Lapwing numbers of agricultural land was noted. Some evidence of predation by Common Gulls on Ringed Plover in the Uists was noted. In Orkney Dunlin and Golden Plover appear to have fledged good numbers of young. A very poor year for Mute Swan on Tiree with only 9 cygnets from 8 breeding pairs noted. Very few broods of Mallard were noted in the Moorfoots while good breeding success was noted in E Ross and parts of Sutherland. Dippers appear to have suffered during the prolonged wet spell in late April with many nests being washed out. In Argyllshire only 2 pairs of Black-throated Divers successfully reared young from 10 pairs checked. Eider have on the whole had a very poor year with only c200 young surviving at Forvie compared to c600 in 1999 and only one brood of 3 being seen on the Eden Estuary. Early breeding wildfowl notably Mallard and Gadwall did well at Loch Leven and Great Crested Grebe had a good year with c50pairs producing an average of over 2 young per pair.

Kittiwake

Seabirds

Seabirds have also had mixed fortunes, with a lot of failures in part due to the severe gales in mid June, however on the Isle of May it was noted that thousands of healthy Kittiwake chicks fledged. This may be partly due to the closure of the Wee Bankie Sandeel Fishery although it is really too early to say for definite . On Tiree it was noted that Fulmar, Shag, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull, Arctic and Common Tern and Guillemot had all increased since the 1978/88 seabird survey. The Sandwich Tern colony at Loch of Strathbeg was washed out during the April floods, however at the nearby Sands of Forvie 700+ chicks were ringed. Auks at North Sutor did very well with Cormorants and Shags reasonably well, the Kittiwake colony fared very badly as usual.

Predators

General impressions from around Scotland are that Buzzard are continuing to do well and are expanding into new areas. Kestrels appeared to do well throughout Scotland and in the Ayrshire study area 14 clutches of 6 eggs and one of 7 were recorded. Of 5 Goshawk nests in Dumfriesshire a ratio of 10 females to 2 males was noted and in Sparrowhawk out of 10 nests a bias of 14 females to 4 males was noted. Golden Eagle on the Western Isles fared reasonably well despite 2 eyries being robbed, however in Central Region out of 6 home territories checked only one pair reared young. Peregrine are still one of the main targets

Skylark

Arctic Tern

for egg collectors and the black market falconry trade, however in Angus an average of 2 young per successful pair fledged; in Central Region and W Perthshire 14 successful pairs reared a total of 27 young. Hen Harrier also continue to be the victims of persecution in many areas although a pair did manage to rear young in Angus this year and on Orkney they had their best season for many years. Merlin in the Lothian and Border regions of Scotland fledged more young than last year, and the first successful breeding record from Barra was noted. A good site occupancy for Osprey was noted in Aberdeenshire with c1 chick per pair fledged and Red Kite in northern Scotland had their best year yet with 30 out of 32 pairs rearing a total of 74 young.

Barn Owl

Good vole numbers in some parts of Lothian and Borders meant that Short-eared Owls were more numerous this year, this could not be said for the Galloway Forest Park were very few Short-eared Owls were noted. Tawny Owls suffered from predation by Pine Martin in E Ross, while in central and W Perthshire they had a very poor season. Barn Owl in the Galloway Forest Park had an excellent year with many broods of 5 and 6 young being recorded.

Gamebirds

Accounts from some areas would suggest that Red Grouse have had a reasonably good year although not many large broods were noted during an upland survey in NE Scotland. Black Grouse on the other hand continue to decline in most areas.

Summer migrants and passerines

One success story is that Corncrake numbers continue to increase on the Western Isles. The future looks bleak for Corn Bunting in Argyll and Ayrshire with no singing males being recorded this year on Tiree, there were 85 in 1977, however Skylark numbers were estimated at between 150 and 180 singing males. Most warblers except perhaps Sedge Warbler appear to have had a poor season in some areas despite the fact that they were later in producing first broods, and at a study site in Dumfriesshire 17 juvenile Reed Warblers have so far been ringed. Willow Warbler in Fife were variable with apparently low success in the east and at least moderate success in the west of the county. A continued increase in the number of Stonechats was noted in most areas while a decrease in Whinchats was noted. Wheatear numbers also appeared down in some areas and on the whole had a poor year. Twite were noted in good numbers in a few areas and Meadow Pipit have had a reasonable season. Ring Ouzel numbers in the Lammermuirs appeared low again this year, but at a study area in Angus they appear to have had a good season despite c15 second broods being predated. Pied Flycatchers have had their worst year for c29 years and predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers is a severe problem at a study site in Central Scotland. A rare record of Long-tailed Tits breeding in Stornoway Woods was unfortunately unsuccessful. Thrushes and most finches in particular Goldfinches have had a good year while Blue and Great Tits appeared to have suffered. Hirundines and in particular Sand Martins appear to have done well, despite some first broods being affected by the poor weather. At Culzean Country Park a nest box scheme for Swifts reported that 9 out of 11 boxes put up were occupied and most pairs reared 2 young. Cuckoos were reported in good numbers in southwest Scotland, Fife and Perthshire.

Stonechat

Rook

Corvids

Out of 15 Raven territories recorded as being occupied 11 pairs are known to have successfully reared young. Four Rookeries in the Stirling area totalled 302 nests; a decrease of 8% since 1999.

Contributors

We would like to thank the following people for taking the time to report their findings to us which then enables us to put together this article. Dave Arthur, Ken Bruce, Dave Butterfield, Paul Daw, Tom Dougall, Alison Duncan, Brian Etheridge, Ian Francis, Pete Gordon, Mike Harris, Les Hatton, Alan Heavisides, Cliff Henty, Angus Hogg, Alex Joss, Sylvia Laing, Alan Lauder, Ron Lawie, Alan Leitch, Shirley Millar, Ian Poxton, Brian Rabbitts, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Derek Robertson, Chris Rollie, Geoff Shaw, Ken Shaw, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Swann, Andy Thorpe, Sarah Wanless, Jim Williams and Kevin Woodbridge. All photographs on this page have been supplied by Fred Westoctt.

Sylvia Laing.

Annual Conference 29 to 31 October 1999

Another very successful SOC Annual Conference in every way – the autumn colours on the drive north and in Strathspey itself were as always spectacular; the pleasure of greeting old friends, some not seen for 12 months or more; the general atmosphere as usual convivial; the speakers were good; and not least the staff of the Balavil Hotel at Newtonmore were as usual friendly and helpful. All these and more made for a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. It is always good to be welcomed at the registration desks by the same old friendly faces – sorry about the word 'old', it seems to be too apt nowadays! Nothing against the same old faces (sorry again), they have down stalwart service for the Club over the years. But where are the new 'younger' band of volunteers? Those who should by now be taking over the not very onerous tasks at conferences and other events. The future of the Club depends so much on new volunteers coming forward to help the Club and its Secretary.

Gannets *Bobby Tulloch*

Flying start

On Friday the conference got off to a flying start (always a good idea when speaking about birds!) When Eric Meek (RSPB) spoke with enthusiasm on wonderful Orkney and its birds. The evening closed with some slides shown by members and with the Photographic competition which was won by Dennis Johnson.

Optimistic outlook

On Saturday morning Stuart Housden, Director of RSPB, Scotland, started proceedings with an optimistic view of the future for birds and was followed by Gordon Riddles' excellent update on his 25 years of studying Kestrels in Ayrshire. Normally the main food of this raptor is the Short-tailed Vole but one forestry site contained remains of a very unusual item of prey - the green feathers of a Budgie!

After the break Ron Summers, spoke on the Slavonian Grebe in Scotland. Present management work at Loch Ruthven is aimed at increasing sedge and Willow cover to help to protect nesting birds. Dave Carse, then gave us a talk on fish-eating birds and salmonids in Scotland which seemed to prove that sawbills are not adversely affecting returning fish numbers to the extent it was previously believed.

A very welcome change to the programme nowadays is the ending of the Saturday morning session at noon thus allowing the afternoon to be spent in the fresh air (usually very fresh at this time of year!) walking and birdwatching. In the late afternoon Charlie Self, gave us an update on the Corncrakes of Coll with the good news that the 6 "singing" males on the reserve when it was purchased have now risen to 23. Ian Mitchell followed with Seabird 2000 using St.Kilda and its magnificent cliff colonies of seabirds as encouragement for volunteers to partake in the forthcoming census.

Evening entertainment

After a fairly speedy AGM came the Annual Dinner (very informal nowadays) which was rounded off by an amusing speech by Dick Balharry. The next item on the Agenda read "Entertainment". Somehow this after dinner slot is not quite right yet. Very few took the floor for dancing. Even the Dumfries Chairman in "full breeding plumage" did not encourage many to participate. Mind you if all those crammed into room 4 after the dinner for drinks and chat had been on the dance floor there would not have been room to move!

A ratty problem!

Sunday began with Bernie Zonfrillo from Glasgow (in a suit!) telling the story of the eradication of rats from Ailsa Craig, the ringing of the Gannets, which started in 1923, followed with birds on farmland on East Lothian where closer links are being forged with the farmers and FWAG is advising on how to improve farmland habitat.

A change from birds

A welcome innovation followed the coffee break when Mike Scott had a non-ornithological topic to discuss, the work of Plantlife in Scotland. Hopefully this idea of a talk on another aspect of natural history will be continued at future conference. John Wills then told the story of Inchgarth, the first SOC reserve, which has been leased for 10 years until 2008 and is probably the most northerly site for breeding Lesser Whitethroat.

The future for birds in Scotland

And, last but not least, Jeremy Greenwood (Director BTO) in his usual enthusiastic manner gave the closing talk on the history of that organisation and its plans for an officer based in Scotland. BTO membership in the UK is over 11,000 but Scotland only has about 800 of these members. It is hoped to increase membership here through close liaison with the SOC who are providing office accommodation for this new Scottish post.

Thus ended another thoroughly enjoyable conference. What treats are in store for us when we meet again at Newtonmore from 3 - 5 November 2000?

Joan Howe

2000 Annual Conference

A lively mix of speakers is expected to make this autumn's conference a particularly popular event. I suggest you book early!

As a new venture, we are flying in a foreign speaker. Klaus Malling Olsen from Denmark is an authoritative speaker who will share his skill and enthusiasm for gull (skua and tern) identification in a key lecture. Other speakers will add to the 'Identification and Migration' theme of this year's conference. Dennis Coutts has not only seen more species in Scotland than most (if not all), but he is also a renowned wildlife photographer. His Friday evening talk on 'Flying via Shetland – vagrants' will give us a rare chance to see some of his collection of superb slides. Norman Elkins, the author of Weather and Migration' will hopefully give us some hints on how to interpret the weather charts with bird migration in mind. Chris Wernham will talk on the BTO's exciting, forthcoming 'Migration Atlas' and Andy Thorpe will share some experiences from the North Sea Bird Club's 21-year history. 'Migrants – a county perspective' is the title of Ken Shaw's talk.

Taxonomic changes have become a frequent topic of conversation these days, but how many of us actually know what the key issues actually are? Martin Collinson, a member of the BOURC's Taxonomic Sub-committee, is well qualified to give us'The Rough Guide to Taxonomy'. I suspect that Ron Summer's talk on the Crossbill situation in Scotland may also raise a few taxonomic questions!

Other research projects to be covered are the on-going Ring Ouzel study in the Moorfoot Hills and Glen Esk (Ian Burfield) and a talk by the Treshnish Isles Auk ringing Group.

Last, but by no means least, I would encourage members to attend Ian Wallace's talk on the Common Rosefinch – a species that has been on the verge of colonising Scotland for some time now.

If you have never been to a conference before – why not come along and take part in the club's main social event of the year. If you have been before, I suspect you will have completed your registration from already!

Ian Andrews

Special offer to SOC members

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Proof of SOC membership is required. Please quote your membership number (*this is on your address label*).

Scottish Crossbill - the beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning?

The NERC Annual Report (**http://www.nerc.ac.uk**) contains a paragraph on the results of a genetic investigation of crossbills in the Highlands. 'The Scottish Crossbill, thought to be Britain's only endemic bird, is indistinguishable genetically from the Common Crossbill and the Parrot Crossbill, and probably interbreeds with them.' The field of crossbill research is hotting up.... A reminder that Ron Summers will be speaking about them at the Annual Conference.

Web site update

Our web site continues to be visited by hundreds of internet users from Scotland and around the world. Its content is being kept up-to-date as much as possible, but this relies heavily on members' input. The Recent Reports section continues to be added to weekly by Angus Murray (Birdline Scotland) and many new photographs have been added. A very popular table of first dates for arriving migrants was frequently updated in spring.

Ayr Branch have taken on the production and maintenance of their own branch web pages (within the SOC's site) - and volunteers from other branches may like to follow their example.

Keith Naylor had kindly allowed us to use his index of *Scottish Birds* volumes 1-21, and his compilation of Scottish rarities records will hopefully be added soon. This list has already been used to produce a draft listing (subject to SBRC approval) of all records of species which have occurred up to 20 times in Scotland.

Web users were able to see the list of 2000 Annual Conference speakers as soon as they were confirmed, and details of the Spring Conference at Galashiels will also be publicised on the web.

New links are being added on a regular basis. The volume of information now available on-line is hard to comprehend - at least our links page gives a few hints on where to start.

Ian Andrews

LETTERS

Dear Sir,

An incident illustrating how pelleted Salmon feed can enter the natural food chain through inefficient commercial practice.

On Monday 26 June 2000 between about 1245 and 1330 hrs I arrived at the Kyle of Lochalsh pier alongside the railway to photograph the Skye Bridge. I noticed 2 newly arrived lorries loaded with plastic sacks of fish-feed on pallets. These had presumably been covered during transit and while I was concentrating on my photography were being prepared for transfer by fork-lift truck to a waiting coastal freighter moored at the end of the pier. I was suddenly aware of a huge influx of gulls and a tremendous increase in noise and activity as upwards of 100 gulls, mostly adult Herring Gulls with some juveniles as well as some adult Greater and Lesser Black-backs, settled onto the top of the consignment and started to tear vigorously at the plastic covers. Within minutes most of the sacks had been punctured as more and more birds piled in to the feast and started gorging themselves on beakfuls of highly nutritious, protein-rich salmon-feed which was by this time spilling down the sides of the lorry onto the platform of the vehicle and onto the road around it.

The birds were very bold and determined, continuing to feed both while I approached right up to the vehicle with my camera, and even while the fork-lift truck drove up, engaged with a pallet and lifted it with the gulls still feeding off the top sacks. It seemed quite clear that this was not the first time this food source had been tapped as the attack by the gulls was immediate and very efficient as soon as the load was open to them. I have no doubt it is a regular occurrence and that the gulls were just waiting at the appropriate time of the day learned from previous experience. There were four of five workmen involved in the job, including the tow drivers of the lorries as well as the fork-lift truck driver, but during the next twenty minutes or so while the pallets on one lorry were slowly collected one by one (those with the stacks of vulnerable sack last!) and transferred to the waiting ship's crane – necessarily a rather slow process – nobody lifted a finger to protect the cargo or deter the predatory gulls while they systematically half-emptied all the top sacks of the load.

A simple answer to the problem would have been one tarpaulin left on top of the load and gradually moved as the pallets were loaded; but nobody seemed in the slightest bit concerned to protect the salmon farm's interests, least of all the fork-lift truck driver or the crane operator who must have been aware they were loading heavily damaged goods onto the ship. Many kilograms of feed must have been lost in the hectic scramble for easy pickings by the gulls. The sacks were labelled 'TROUW Aquaculture SALMON DIETS' and contained small, black, round pellets, a sample of which was taken for submission to Friends of the Earth Scotland who are currently researching the use of fish-feeds containing the illegal toxin Ivomectin or its illegal successor which some claim is almost as dangerous.

Chris Mylne, Mains House, Linlithgow,
West Lothian EH49 6QA.

Library news and reviews

News from the Waterston Library

SBN readers may be aware that a computer was acquired for the Library last year. The first task for this machine was computerisation of the card indexes of books and journals. This has now been completed: there are (at time of writing) 3,751 books, with 2887 authors, held in the Library. Copies of 416 journals are also held, about half of which are current. There is a small lending section of 280 books, and copies of 5 journals. Use of the Library, by SOC members and others, is always welcome. Intending users should ring Regent Terrace to arrange a time to visit. If you wish to make contact outwith office hours I can be phoned at home if necessary (0131 441 2675).

The Library is staffed by volunteer helpers, who come in to Regent Terrace for a few hours a week and can be available to provide advice and assistance to users, either in person or over the telephone. Anyone staying in or close to Edinburgh who has a few hours to spare on a regular basis and who would like to help in this way should contact me – either at Regent Terrace or at home. One of the helpers until recently has been Hetty Harper, whose late husband, Bill, will be remembered by many as Librarian for many years. Unfortunately Hetty has been none too well recently and has had to give up coming in to the Library on Friday mornings. I am sure all *SBN* readers will join in sending her good wishes.

The Library claims to be 'the best ornithological library in Scotland'. One reason why this is so is that it has benefited over the years from many generous legacies and donations of books (including, for example, from William Brotherston – see below). If your own collection of bird books, or indeed books about nature in general, is now taking up too much space, please consider donating the surplus to the Library. Books acquired in this way that are duplicates of those already in the collection are sold (eg at Conference) and the proceeds used for buying new books.

John G Davies, Librarian

Hawaii – The Ecotraveller's Wildlife Guide *by Les Beletsky. Published by Academic Press. 2000. 416pp. ISBN 0-12-084813-9. £19.95 (pbk).*

The enthusiasm of the author clearly comes through in this book. If you were heading off to Hawaii it would be an invaluable companion – helping you to identify all the types of Flora and Fauna that you would be likely to encounter. If you are contemplating a visit Hawaii, this book is sure to make up your mind up for you! A book both suitable for beginners and for those more experienced in the field of ecology. It is obviously well thought out and is well-illustrated, taking a broad view of the attributes of the Hawaiian Isles – Ecotourism, Conservation, Geography & Climate, Parks & Reserves, Flora and Fauna to name but a few. While a guide to each individual species is impossible, an enlightening explanation of much to interest any visitor to the Hawaiian Islands is clearly presented, with excellent photographic plates for quick and easy reference. For those requiring a more in depth reference to various aspects of Hawaiian ecology there is a section on references and additional reading.

Helen Cameron

Birdwatching Sites in the Highlands. *RSPB Highland Members' Group 56 pages, 4 maps, 50 line drawings. £2.50 (£3.00 incl. P&P). ISBN 1 901930 22 X (pbk).*

This site guide has been produced by the RSPB Highland Members' Group and is a compact, well-produced booklet detailing 44 locations divided among four regions: Inverness Area & East Highland, Northern Highland, South Highland, West & Central Highland. Although 18 of the sites are within the smallest region (Inverness Area and East Highland), this reflects the authors' wish to represent areas within a comfortable drive from Inverness and in no way diminishes the appeal of the guide, with the remaining 26 sites spread fairly evenly among the other areas. Although some of the sites are duplicated in Madders' and Welstead's *Where to Watch Birds in Scotland*, there is relatively little overlap and so the guide is complementary to that volume. There are some perhaps surprising omissions, with information describing the RSPB's Abernethy Forest limited to the Loch Garten Osprey Centre and no mention of the Cairngorm plateau. However, the greater promotion of less familiar sites is likely to beneficial for improved general awareness of the rich diversity of the Highlands, and to the Highlands economy as a whole. In addition, there are undoubtedly other good sites waiting to be discovered so this volume may stimulate further ornithological coverage.

Detailed access instructions in bold type allow for quick reference but are primarily for those with their own transport and a road atlas is recommended. Public transport information is listed for some sites and useful contact numbers are listed. It should be noted that some places may be temporarily closed to visitors for one reason or another. A short description of each site describes the habitat and its attractions, with some site combinations also suggested. Additional information is available regarding reserve summer events and guided walks programmes, other local visitors' guides, suggested wildlife cruise operators, exhibitions, restaurants and a distillery.

Although most sites are close to roads, some walking is recommended in order to take full advantage of the area. Codes of conduct for driving, access and hill walking are included, while other information covers the rapidly-declining Capercaillie and Black Grouse, disturbance (including photography) of other specially protected species, as well as procedural advice for wildlife crime reporting such as egg collecting and where to send records of bird sightings.

This guide is a very attractive and useful reference, illustrated copiously by John Busby, Dan Powell and local artist Iain Sarjeant, with basic maps of the four regions showing the distribution of sites by John Tasker. The summary of sites is at the end of the booklet in alphabetical order, though I feel that a more comprehensive contents page listing sites by region would have been more helpful. A summary at the back may have been more useful for listing the sites at which particular species, such as Crested Tit, could be seen.

However, this guide is thoroughly recommended for those living in and those visiting the Highlands, and all those with an interest in the Highlands and its wildlife. Funds raised by sales of the booklet will allow grants to be made to RSPB approved projects and to local groups involved with environmental projects.

Bob Dawson

The State of the Nations' Birds. *Chris Mead, Whittet Books, 2000, ISBN 1-873580-45-2, £12.99*

This new book by retired BTO veteran Chris Mead provides a snapshot of the status of all Britain's breeding birds at the start of this new century. After a review of how our birds are censused, 6 broad habitat types are described in some detail giving a taste of past and current conservation issues. There are similar chapters on climate and weather, and persecution and protection. The main attraction of the book though is the species accounts section, which gives a snappy summary of the status of all our breeding species (over 200), complete with population estimates for Britain and for Europe. Using symbols, there is an indication of whether numbers are increasing or decreasing, and what the future may hold. There is even an indicator of how likely you are to see the species.

The book has already received favourable reviews and given the scope and background of the author, it is a book that all SOC members should at least take a look at. It is more accessible than the various national Atlases and BTO survey reports it derives much of its data from, and presents a lot of information all in one handy paperback book, at a reasonable price.

The source of the data is sound, mainly the national Atlases (sadly no local Atlases nor Bird Reports), BTO surveys and Rare Breeding Bird Panel reports. The introductory chapters are interesting to read but will offer little to conservation-minded birdwatchers, although I was fascinated (indeed shocked) to learn that 30-60 million birds die each year as a result of collisions with cars, although there is no indication where this figure comes from.

Chris has a very chatty written style, which might appeal to some but which I found a little informal. It is written as if Chris were giving you a lecture today, fine at the time, but with the consequence that many comments will date quickly. The information presented is often clearly a personal view, not necessarily scientifically proven, and which you might find you disagree with.

On the topical issue of raptor persecution, I feel that Chris does not fully appreciate the problems we have here in Scotland. The prospects for Hen Harriers are described as good, and the description of Sparrowhawk population change is all to do with the impact of pesticides in the 1950s and 1960s, largely history now of course. There is no reference here to the current controversy of how Sparrowhawks and Peregrines are alleged to cause population declines in gamebirds, pigeons and songbirds. In the Persecution and Protection chapter, illegal raptor persecution by gamekeepers is almost dismissed. The opportunity to present a scientifically-based summary in popular language has been missed here.

Sadly the book is marred by shoddy editing. I found a gross over-use of hyphens and exclamation marks and some clumsy sentence constructions. With so many, this quickly becomes infuriating. Maybe I'm a niggler, but Chris also falls into the all too frequent trap of using "dependant" when the word required should have been "dependent", making nonsense of the sentence. There are a few typographical errors too. There is even an ornithological inaccuracy. Drawings of Gannets flying, diving or coming out of the water, are used to indicate the changing fortunes of species. In the key for the species accounts though, these birds are referred to as gulls!

The State of the Nations' Birds could have been a useful reference book, but it is best taken as light reading with pointers to the more reliable original texts. I recommend that you pick up a copy and glance through the pages yourself. You will quickly get a feel of whether you would learn something from the book and whether you could cope with the style of writing. Personally, I will stick to my well-thumbed Atlases and Bird Reports.

Mark Holling

William Brotherson, SCC (1913-1981)

William Brotherson was born in Edinburgh in 1913, and educated at George Watson's College. He studied law at Edinburgh University, at the same time as serving an apprenticeship to become a lawyer. He graduated in 1934 and then practised as joint and later sole partner of a legal firm specialising in Supreme Court work. He served in the British Army throughout the Middle East during World War Two, where he was able to combine his interests in photography, middle eastern culture and history, and ornithology.

The Collection consists of almost 1400 photographic prints, the negatives of which relate to those prints, 700 lantern slides, and numerous manuscript notebooks, diaries and printed ephemera, all closely related to his period spent in the Middle East.

The William Brotherson Collection was given to Edinburgh University Library in 1999, thorugh the generosity of his family. After conservation work has been completed, the collection will be available for consultation in the Special Collections Department.

REQUESTS

Edinburgh Swift survey

Please send in your records of Swifts in Edinburgh and the Lothians, especially screaming parties and nests, to **Ian Andrews, 39 Clayknowes Drive, Musselburgh EH21 6UW.** This survey is organised by the SOC in cooperation with the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership. Details can be found on SOC website (under surveys)

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

As part of a long term study of Aberdeen's roof nesting Oystercatchers, we are fitting the birds with Darvic rings on the left leg. These rings are white or yellow and bear a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits, eg A26, reading down the leg. We would be grateful for any sightings, even incomplete ones, and can provide a prompt history. Please inform either: **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS (01224 483717)** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Aberdeen AB23 8PP (01224 823184).**

Request for Redshank remains

As part of a study to estimate the relative proportions of Icelandic and Scottish Redshank overwintering on Scottish estuaries, I am looking for Redshank corpses for strontium isotope analysis. I hope to obtain latitudinally specific signals from the bones of Redshank thus allowing me to identify their race, but to do this I need a sample of Redshank corpses (raptor/roadkills) from the Scottish breeding population and the Scottish overwintering population. If any SOC members come across any Redshank remains on their travels (condition not important) I would be very grateful if they could contact me: **Rhys Bullman, Forth Estuary Ecology Group, Institute of Biological Sciences, University of Stirling. FK9 4LA (01786 467755 Ext: 7816) or email rhys.bullman@stir.ac.uk**

Colour ringed Dunlin

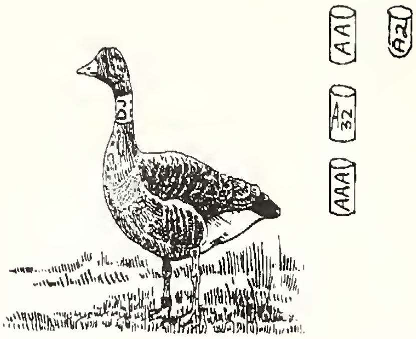
Since 1997 we have been colour ringing breeding adult and pullus Dunlin at various locations in Orkney. All birds ringed as adults are identifiable as individuals. On the right leg there is a yellow colour ring above the knee, and two colour rings below the knee. The left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. The chicks also have a yellow colour ring above the knee on the right leg and the left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. Birds ringed as chicks are only identifiable as to the year in which they were ringed. Even if the combinations are incomplete, we would be grateful for all sightings of birds that have a YELLOW colour ring above the knee on the right leg. All sightings should be sent to either **Stuart Williams Crafty, Firth, Orkney KW17 2ES Tel: 0185676 1742 email Stuart@gavia.freeserve.co.uk, or Jim Williams, Fairholm, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EQ Tel: 0185676 1317** Acknowledgement will be sent along with full history of the bird.

Ring Ouzel study group

Birders across the UK are being asked to look out for ringed Ring Ouzels this spring and summer, as part of an effort to discover more about this declining upland bird. Ring Ouzels in England and Scotland have been colour ringed during the last 2 years and birdwatchers are asked to report any sightings during migration, the breeding season, and particularly in late summer, since almost nothing is known about where Ring Ouzels spend the 8 weeks before southward migration. Colour combinations and locations (6 figure grid reference if possible) should be sent to **Ring Ouzel Study Group, c/o Julian Hughes, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL,** or e-mail **ringouzel@hotmail.com**

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR Tel: 01862 894329 email Bob.Swann@hcs.uhi.ac.uk.**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

NOTICES

Change to BTO Regional Network

July this year saw Andy Wight recruited as Regional Representative for Perthshire. His address is: **Sunshine Cottage, 2 North Green, Spittalfield, Perthshire. PH1 4JT.** Andy fills an important gap in coverage and his addition to the network is extremely valuable. Andy would be particularly keen to hear from any volunteers willing to take up a BBS, WBBS or WFBS square within Perthshire or from those with interest in carrying out any other BTO surveys.

There are a number of other areas, particlarly in the west and north of Scotland that require Regional Representatives. If you are interested in becoming an "RR" please contact **Alan Lauder, Head of BTO Scotland, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. EH7 5BT. Tel: 0131 558 8009. Email: alan.lauder@bto.org.**

New Editor for *British Birds*

Tim Sharrock will be retiring in early December, and it is therefore necessary to appoint a new Editor for *British Birds*. This is an exciting opportunity for a person with a passion for ornithology and birding to help shape the future of the journal. If you are interested and think you have the necessary drive, skills and enthusiasm for this challenging role and an ability to relate to and motivate people, please write for further details (enclosing a SAE) to **Dr Richard Chandler, 2 Rusland Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 8AU.**

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to: **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

SOC car stickers

Ian Andrews has designed a smart new car sticker featuring the Club's new logo. These can be purchased from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, at 50pence each plus a second class stamp.

SOC NOTICES

With this issue

Enclosed with this issue are the *Scottish Bird Report*, winter meetings programme, winter excursions, Report of Council/Accounts, Conference programme and booking form (see page 11 for details of speakers) and for members who still pay by means other than Direct Debit a Renewal Notice and Direct Debit Form.

We urge all members to pay their subscription by Direct Debit, as this makes a huge difference to the time spent at 21 Regent Terrace processing subscriptions.

2000 Scottish Ringers' Conference

The 2000 conference will be hosted by the Lothian Ringing Group and will be held at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar over the weekend 17-19 November 2000. For further detail please send sae to **Alan Leitch, 2 Burgess Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 2BD.**

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the volunteers who give assistance in the office, and also those who came in to assist in despatching the June mailing. If you would like to help with this task please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on **0131 556 6042** for details.

Photographic competition

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT** no later than 2 October 2000. Subjects must be live wild birds photographed in Scotland and with the appropriate licences as required. They should be clearly marked with the photographers name, the species and locality. All entries will be returned as soon as possible after the conference.

2001 SOC/BTO Birdwatchers' Conference

Borders branch of the SOC are organising the 2001 spring conference which will be held on 17 March 2001 at the Heriot Watt University, Galashiels. Details of speakers and booking form will appear with the next issue of *SBN*.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 2000 were:

April - 1st £30 P Barrie, Edinburgh; 2nd £25 P Speak, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 R Caine, Eyemouth; 4th £10 D Boddington, Herefordshire.
May - 1st £50 D Shepherd, Dundee; 2nd £30 D Rowling, Blebo Craigs; 3rd £20 S Denney, Glasgow; 4th £10 M Ross, Melrose.
June - 1st £30 M Kerrod, Bowden; 2nd £20 P Sandeman, Killin; 3rd £10 M K Ingham, Edinburgh.

At the end of the 200 Club's 11th year, on 31 May 2000, 45 members had won £1245 in prizes (a record sum). All members of the 200 Club are warmly thanked for their continued support. Any SOC member, over 18, who would like to join now for the rest of the year can send me a cheque for £9, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', which will be gratefully acknowledged. With a few members not re-joining, there are some spare number to fill up to 200 again, so please help us to maintain our target number. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176).**

Scottish Bird News

The SOC would like to express their sincere thanks to Dr Stan da Prato for the amount of time and effort he has put into editing *Scottish Bird News* over the last 5 years. Many members may not realise the amount of time producing *SBN* takes and we are very grateful to him. We are however pleased to point out that Stan has agreed to continue as Editor for *Scottish Birds* for the time being., and this is greatly appreciated.
Contributions from members and branches for *SBN* will continue to be dealt with through 21 Regent Terrace.

Wanted for *SBN*

'The Best of Days, The Worst of Days....'

Extracts from your notebooks/logs or journals which describe your best (or worst) days out in the field. Doesn't have to be about Scotland, but the more Scottish submissions we get, the better. Articles should aim to be about 1 page of *SBN,* about 1800 to 2000 words. Please send them to the Editor at **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT, email mail@the-soc.org.uk, fax 0131 558 9947.**

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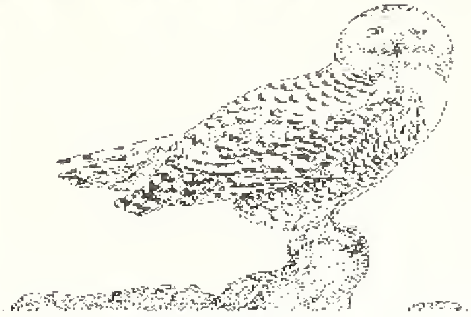


Bringing you the latest news from Borders to Shetland

Please phone any news into the 24 hour hotline:
01292 611994
* This is a Premium Rate number

Recent Reports mid JUNE – mid AUGUST 2000.

In what seemed most of the time to be largely a quiet period there were reports of some fantastically rare birds with no fewer than 4 potential firsts for Scotland seen as well as a second for Scotland. Orkney hit a purple patch at the end of June when a female **Canvasback** and a pale morph **Booted Eagle** were seen, both potential Scottish firsts. The **Canvasback** was on the Loch of Rummie, Sanday on the 21–23 June, an adult summer **White-winged Black Tern** also present on the loch at the same time. There is a previous June Orkney record which was considered a definite escape whilst, if this record is accepted, it will be the first female to be so in Britain. The Eagle flew north over North Ronaldsay on the 22 June and follows on from a series of sightings since February of last year - possibly the same pale morph bird throughout Ireland and England. As is the case in most summers intensive **Storm Petrel** tape luring sessions took place throughout Scotland, with most birds caught as usual on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay though ringers at Cove (Aberdeenshire) took the star prize this year with Scotland's first **Swinhoe's Petrel** caught overnight on the 5 August. This is only the fourth record for Britain - the previous 3 all having been caught at Tynemouth (Northumberland) between 1989-1994. There are several other European records of this species, formerly only known to breed in the Northwest Pacific and wintering in the Indian Ocean, other birds this year have been caught in Norway and Ireland. The final Scottish "first" of the summer is the **Semipalmated Plover** seen at Uisaed Point (Argyll) on the 5 July. The bird was only seen briefly but gave the diagnostic cher-wit call throughout its stay. There are only 2 other British records of this North American equivalent of the **Ringed Plover.**

It was a good summer for North American waders, no fewer than 9 **Pectoral Sandpipers** were seen between the 25 June – 13 August, 2 or 3 **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen on Orkney and Shetland during July and an adult was at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 13 August whilst a summer plumaged **Long-billed Dowitcher** was on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) on 4-15 August. An adult summer plumaged **Red-necked Stint** was at Pool of Virkie (Shetland) on 18–21July (only the second Scottish record after a freshly dead juvenile on Fair Isle on 31 Aug 1994). All the other British records have been of midsummer adults. A **Pacific Golden Plover** was at Peninerine, South Uist on 31 July – first Outer Hebrides record if accepted whilst 2 **Red-necked Phalaropes** were seen at Uisaed Point on the 6 Aug (with one on Fair Isle on 16 July) and an adult **Little Ringed Plover** at Musselburgh on the 2 July was followed by 3 juveniles seen at Kingston (Moray) in early August. Amongst the scarcer waders **Wood Sandpiper** showed up well with 22 seen in July and August whilst unspectacular numbers of **Green Sandpiper** were seen with 8 at Montrose Basin on the 7 Aug being the largest count. Of the 15 **Spotted Redshanks** reported 6 at Dun's Dish (Angus) on the 23 Aug was the largest count, 9 **Little Stints** were reported and 20 **Curlew Sandpipers** were seen with the first juveniles reported from the 16 August. Sea watching on the whole was uninspiring with **Shearwaters,** only 2 **Cory's** being reported and c60 **Sootys** reported from the 3 July, though reports of **Balearic Shearwaters** continue to increase, this species is now seen

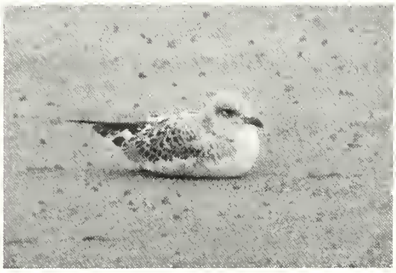
Red-necked Stint *Dennis Coutts*

routinely in certain parts of Scotland from mid August onwards, 14 were seen from the 5 Aug mainly in Ayrshire and Argyll. Twenty two **Pomarine Skuas** were reported in July and Aug whilst also in Aug 14 **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen from the 9 Aug all apart from 4 being adults. Eight **Black Terns** were seen whilst a **Gull-billed Tern** was at Loch Bee, South Uist on 14–16 July with presumably the same bird nearby on the South Ford on 13 August. The only previous Outer Hebrides record was also on South Uist in May 1987. Also on South Uist an adult **Sabine's Gull** was off Ardivachar Point on 20 Aug, whilst 2 adult **Yellow-legged Gulls** were seen in Aberdeenshire during July and Aug, a first summer **Ross's Gull** was on Stronsay (Orkney) on the 25 June and of the 6 **Mediterranean Gulls** reported one was a juvenile at Leven (Fife) from the 5 Aug – only the third bird to be seen in full juvenile plumage in Scotland.

A female **Red-footed Falcon** was reported at Duthie Park, Aberdeen on the 16 July while at least one **Hobby** summered on Speyside, and for the second year running at least one bird was seen at Vane Farm RSPB, Loch Leven from the 2 August. Also on Speyside **Spotted Crake** were confirmed breeding at RSPB Insh Marshes with a nest found containing 17 eggs, 14 of which hatched. Five **Common Cranes** were seen in the period including a summering bird at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg whilst 2 **Spoonbills** summered on the Ythan Estuary, with up to 2 birds also present throughout at RSPB Mersehead (Dumfries and Galloway) where a **Little Egret** was also present from the 20 July.

A **Bee-eater** was in the Thrumster area (Caithness) on the 29–30 July – the third county record whilst a belated item from Caithness concerns a county first in the shape of a **Dark-eyed Junco** near John o' Groats in the last week of April. Most of the British records of the species are in April and early May. Two classic Fair Isle August rarities occurred in the form of a juvenile **Citrine Wagtail** there on the 14–16 Aug and a **Greenish Warbler** on the 19 Aug whilst the only **Wryneck** seen was there on the 14 Aug and 4 **Barred Warblers** were seen on Shetland from the 17 August. Four adult **Rose-coloured Starlings** were seen from mid June onwards, 3 on Shetland and one in Moray, whilst a male **Black-headed Bunting** was at Norwick, Unst from the 6 July–1 August. Finally in July a **Red-backed Shrike** was seen on Fair Isle on the 3 July with a **Common Rosefinch** there on the 28 July and a **Marsh Warbler** at Quendale, Shetland on the 12 July with one on Fair Isle on the 19 August.

Angus Murray



Juvenile Mediterranean Gull *Alan Lauder*

Gull-billed Tern *Ken Shaw*

ISBN 0268-3199
Scottish Bird News

Edited by
Martin Collinson
Assisted by
Ian Andrews, Helen Cameron and Sylvia Laing

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

The SOC

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 64th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

passwords to access members' web pages
'snowy' & 'owl'

QL 690 S4 S45 BIRD

Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC No 60 Dec 2000

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 30 2001
LIBRARIES

Hallyards Tree Sparrow Project, 2000

The Tree Sparrow **Passer montanus** *has declined by 85% in the UK in the last 25 years (see Hilton, 2000). As a result, in 1999, as part of the Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, a nest box scheme specifically targeting Tree Sparrows was initiated at Hallyards Wood and Hallyards Farm near Kirkliston with the assistance of City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) Planning Department.*

Study Area

The 2 sites, connected by a short lane, are sandwiched between the River Almond to the north and Edinburgh Airport to the south. Hallyards Wood, owned by CEC, comprises approximately 4 hectares of deciduous woodland. The east side of the wood consists of mainly coppiced Sycamore approximately 8-10 metres high. The ground is extremely damp due to the subsidence of old mine workings and supports Marsh Marigold and similar plants. The remainder of the wood comprises of mature Sycamore, Ash, Elm, and Birch. Elder and Hawthorn are also common. Snowberry makes up much of the ground cover.

Hallyards Farm has long been associated with free-range pigs. Cereal crops are also grown and a large stable block ensures that many fields are given over to pony grazing. In addition, the gardens of the farmhouse and surrounding cottages are large with mature Sycamore, Lime, Horse Chestnut, Beech, Copper Beech and Elm.

Methods

In 1999, 10 standard nest boxes with 30 mm diameter holes were erected along the eastern edge of the wood, facing on to a pig field. Of these, only 2 went on to be used by Tree Sparrows although a further 6 showed signs of Tree Sparrow nest building (straw lining etc). Great Tits occupied the other 2 boxes. A further 4 boxes were erected on roadside Sycamores within the farm complex. Nests were built in all 4 but eggs were laid in only 2.

In all, 46 chicks fledged from 10 nesting attempts. All the chicks were ringed under licence and 2 were subsequently retrapped in late February 2000 in a catch of 25 Tree Sparrows from a flock of approximately 60 wintering on the farm.

In winter 99/00 the project appeared to be in jeopardy when CEC Recreation Department announced it was to clear-fell Hallyards Wood under pressure from Edinburgh Airport. Many different reasons were bandied about with the most plausible being that the wood was causing distortion on radar images.

All 10 boxes on the wood's eastern edge were taken down on 26/2/00. As old diseased elms in one of the farm gardens were being felled at the time, it was decided to site them all on other tree species in that general area in the hope that they would replace natural hole sites that may have been lost.

The boxes, including the 4 already up at the farm, were erected at heights of between 3 and 5 metres on Sycamore (6), Lime (2), Horse Chestnut (2), Beech (2), Copper Beech (one) and Ash (one). The majority were positioned with the hole facing between north and east. The distance between boxes varied from 3 to 40 metres, with an average of 10 metres separating them.

Tree Sparrow at nest box *Bobby Smith*

2000 Breeding Season

First egg dates and clutch sizes were obtained by visiting the nests at 5-day intervals. As Tree Sparrows are prone to desertion if overly disturbed, once the first egg date had been established (retrospectively if necessary) and the clutch size was known, the nests were not visited again until the chicks were a suitable size to ring (8-10 days). Bethune (1961) suggests incubation commences with the laying of the penultimate egg. Summers-Smith (1995) cites a modal incubation period of 12 days and fledging occurring at 15 days. These values have been used as the basis to calculate incubation, hatching and fledging dates. Intervals between fledging and the commencement of the next clutch are also based on these criteria.

Nestling Mortality

In the first clutches, every chick that hatched went on to fledge successfully and only 3 died before fledging in the second broods. In the third clutches 13 of the 15 chicks died shortly after hatching. Very heavy rain on 2/3 August was probably the main reason for this. The adults would have had to spend a great deal of time searching for insect food for the young in these conditions. The longer the adults spent away from the nest the more likely the chicks were to chill. In addition, one chick (from Box 1) was killed by a cat on 16/6/00, 6 days after leaving the nest.

Colour-ringing

All the chicks were fitted with a metal British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ring and up to 2 plastic colour rings in combinations that allow individual identification of each bird. Colours used were red, orange, yellow, white, light blue, dark green and mauve. It is hoped to follow up on the fortunes of the nestlings during the winter should they join any local flocks.

It is also hoped to catch as many of the adults as possible over the winter in order to colour-ring them as well. This will allow us to

Table 1. *Box usage throughout the 2000 breeding season.*

	Box B	Box C	Box D	Box 5	Box 9	Box 2	Box 7	Box 10	Box 3	Box 1	Box 8	Box 6	Box A	Box 4
1st Clutch														
1st egg date	04-May	05-May	05-May	05-May	05-May	06-May	09-May	10-May	11-May	11-May	Blue Tit	Great Tit	Unused	Unused
Clutch size	6	5	5	6	5	4	5	5	4	5				
Estimated incubation	08-May	08-May	08-May	09-May	08-May	08-May	12-May	13-May	13-May	14-May				
Estimated hatch date	20-May	20-May	20-May	21-May	20-May	20-May	24-May	25-May	25-May	26-May				
No. hatched	*4	*4	*2	6	5	4	*3	5	*1	*4				
Estimated fledge date	04-Jun	04-Jun	04-Jun	05-Jun	04-Jun	04-Jun	08-Jun	09-Jun	09-Jun	10-Jun				
No. fledged	4	4	2	6	5	4	3	5	1	4				
2nd Clutch														
1st egg date	12-Jun	13-Jun	12-Jun	12-Jun	26-Jun	Unused	19-Jun	20-Jun	14-Jun	19-Jun	19-Jun	Unused	16-Jun	Unused
**Interval	8	9	8	7	22		11	11	4	9				
Clutch size	5	5	4	7	2		4	4	****2	5	5		5	
Estimated incubation	15-Jun	16-Jun	14-Jun	17-Jun	26-Jun		21-Jun	22-Jun		22-Jun	22-Jun		19-Jun	
Estimated hatch date	27-Jun	28-Jun	26-Jun	29-Jun	08-Jul		03-Jul	04-Jul		04-Jul	04-Jul		01-Jul	
No. hatched	5	5	*2	7	2		*2	4	0	5	5		5	
Estimated fledge date	12-Jul	13-Jul	11-Jul	14-Jul	23-Jul		18-Jul	19-Jul		19-Jul	19-Jul		16-Jul	
No. fledged	5	5	2	7	***1		***0	4	0	5	5		5	
3rd Clutch														
1st egg date	Unused	18-Jul	17-Jul	19-Jul	Unused	Unused	Unused	Unused	18-Jul	Unused	Unused	21-Jul	Unused	Unused
**Interval		5	6	5										
Clutch size		5	5	5					5			4		
Estimated incubation		21-Jul	20-Jul	22-Jul					21-Jul			23-Jul		
Estimated hatch date		02-Aug	01-Aug	03-Aug					02-Aug			04-Aug		
No. hatched		*3	*3	*3					*4			*****0		
Estimated fledge date		17-Aug	16-Aug	18-Aug					17-Aug			19-Aug		
No. fledged		***0	***2	***0					***0			0		

*Infertile eggs **Interval between fledging and start of next clutch ***Chicks dead in nest ****Eggs predated before full clutch known
***** Infertile and fertile eggs

Table 2 ***summarises the 2000 breeding season at Hallyards:***

	1st clutch (n=10)	2nd clutch (n=10*)	3rd clutch (n=5)	Total clutches (n=25)
1st egg	4 May - 11 May	12 June - 26 June	17 July - 21 July	
Mean interval between clutches		9.9 days	5.3 days	
Mean clutch size	5.0	4.6	4.8	4.8
Mode	5	5	5	5
Range	4 - 6	2 - 7	4 - 5	2 - 7
Total eggs	50	46	24	120
Projected hatch dates	20 May - 25 May	26 June - 8 July	1 Aug - 4 Aug	
Total hatched	38	42	15	95
% hatched	76.0	91.3	62.5	79.2
Total fledged	38	39	2	79
% fledged (eggs)	76.0	84.8	8.3	65.8
% fledged (hatched)	100.0	92.9	13.3	83.2
Mean fledged	3.8	3.9	0.4	3.2
Total infertile eggs	12	4	7	23
% infertile eggs	24.0	8.7	29.2	19.2
Clutches with infertile eggs	6	2	5	13
Fertile eggs failing to hatch	0	0	2	2
Total deaths before fledging	0	3	13	16
% deaths before fledging	0.0	7.1	86.7	16.8
Projected fledging date	4 June - 10 June	12 July - 24 July	16 Aug - 19 Aug	

*excludes Box 3 where eggs vanished before full clutch size known

determine which birds use each box next breeding season and whether the same males and females are involved in each clutch. Work currently being undertaken at Rutland Water in England would suggest that it is not always the same female in consecutive clutches.

Colony size

From Table 1 we can tell that at least eleven pairs of Tree Sparrow were present. Another pair was noted feeding young in a nest in a hole in a cemented stone wall on 3 July, during the second clutches, taking the number of pairs to at least a dozen. It is very likely that there were even more pairs using "natural" holes but this species is so secretive during nesting (pers obs.) that they were overlooked. This should be borne in mind during any future breeding censuses.

Tree Sparrow in Hawthorn

Bobby Smith

2001 and beyond.

Given the success in attracting Tree Sparrows to the nest boxes, it is hoped to erect more in 2001 both at Hallyards and further afield. Winter 2000/2001 will be spent looking for suitable sites between Kirkliston and Dalmeny/South Queensferry.

Acknowledgements

All the residents of Hallyards, particularly the Woods, the Bairds and the Murphys, gave their support to the project; granting access to gardens, lending ladders, providing refreshments etc. Dave Jamieson, formerly of CEC Planning Department, arranged delivery of the nest boxes from the Countryside Ranger Centre at the Hermitage of Braid, Edinburgh. Simon Burton, Andy Coates and Clive Walton helped with the fieldwork. Rob Campbell not only helped with the fieldwork but also gave up a lot of his free time helping to erect the boxes in the first place and subsequently re-siting them. Tom Dougall improved an earlier draft.

References

Hilton, A. 2000. Pp 86-87 in The Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan. The Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership.
Bethune, G. 1961. Notes sur le Moineau friquet, *Passer montanus* (L.) Gerfaut 51: 387-398.
Summers-Smith, J. D. 1995. *The Tree Sparrow.* Private. Cleveland. Summers-Smith.

Sightings of colour-ringed Tree Sparrows

If you do happen to spot a Tree Sparrow with colour rings, please note the colours, where they were positioned (e.g., right leg: red over yellow plastic, left leg: metal ring), place and date. Sightings can be reported to me at the address below.

Nest box appeal

The Countryside Ranger Centre's sawmill was closed during 2000 so will be unable to supply nest boxes in future. If you know of anyone who could donate nest boxes or suitable timber to the p)roject I would be delighted to hear from them. All assistance will be acknowledged.

Alan Hilton
4 Arrol Place,
South Queensferry
Lothian
EH30 9QB
0131 319 1631

Scottish Birds Records Committee

English Names

There has been considerable debate in recent years concerning the use of English names for our birds. On the one hand there have been the traditionalists who wished to retain historic names and on the other those who prefer to see a standardisation throughout the world. The Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOURC) are responsible for maintaining the *British List* and in 1992 they made substantial changes to the English names appearing on the list. This was done in the belief that the desirability for unambiguous English names was widely recognised, particularly given the ease of foreign travel and the great increase in books and television programmes about birds throughout the world. Following the changes made by BOURC, much discussion took place, but most of the new English names appear now to be widely accepted. Whilst it is normal practice for birdwatchers to 'colloquially' use old names in conversation (e.g. Eider, Scaup) most serious ornithological publications and journals are now using either BOURC names (e.g. Common Eider, Greater Scaup) or something similar.

The members of SBRC have now unanimously agreed to adopt the English names appearing in the *British List* for the *Scottish List*. This decision has not been taken lightly, bearing in mind the historical and cultural association of many names and the disruption that follows extensive changes. However there are many advantages in following BOURC in the use of English names. These can be summarised as follows

- Unambiguous English names are important in national checklists.
- Scottish birdwatchers travel widely and are aware of problems caused by parochial attitudes in foreign countries and the difficulties caused by different English names being used for the same species, or identical English names being used for more than one species. We wish to set our own house in order.
- The argument that Latin names are unique is valid, but most birdwatchers know only a fraction of the ten thousand Latin names used for the world's birds.
- The *Scottish List* follows the *British List* in all other respects including use of Latin names, species taxonomy, sequence and classification.
- Many of the names now considered to be traditional would have been radical only fifty years ago when such names as Eversmann's Warbler and Pomatorhine Skua were in common usage. It is therefore not a serious option to never make changes.

The new names are to be adopted from 1 January 2001. They now appear on the Club's web site and will be used in all future versions of the *Scottish List*.

Subspecies

We are now well advanced with the production of a list of subspecies recorded in Scotland and this is expected to appear in *Scottish Birds* during 2001. A provisional list will appear on the Club's web site by the end of December and we would welcome any comments in connection with the accuracy of this list (either errors or omissions), which should if possible be sent to me by the end of February.

SBRC List

The *British Birds* Rarities Committee is responsible for the acceptance of records of species that are rare in Britain. There are a number of additional species which are rare in Scotland, and SBRC are responsible for deciding those that require to be authenticated by the submission of written descriptions. The SBRC list of species is reviewed from time to time and has recently been revised, with the amended version expected to remain in place for the next three years.

The Scottish Bird Report will only include records of the above species if they have been accepted by either SBRC or a local records committee. Assessment of a record can only take place by a committee if a full written description is provided by the observer. This should be submitted by the observer to the Local Recorder.

* A dispensation has been granted to the Local Recorders in Shetland & Orkney that records of species marked with this symbol can be accepted at *their discretion* without full written descriptions. A similar dispensation has been granted to the Argyll Local Recorder in respect of Balearic Shearwater.

In addition to the above, all records of subspecies recorded in Scotland on twenty or fewer occasions, should be examined by either BBRC or SBRC. All 'new' pre-1950 records of species appearing on the BBRC List require to be accepted by SBRC.

Common Eider, in accordance with the BOURC *A D Johnson*

SBRC List 2001-2003

KEY

UPPER CASE (BLOCK CAPITALS): SBRC would prefer to receive all records.
Lower case: These should normally be dealt with locally if a local records committee exists, but should be submitted to SBRC if there is no local committee.

CORY'S SHEARWATER
GREAT SHEARWATER
Balearic Shearwater
Little Egret
PURPLE HERON
White Stork
Green-winged Teal
Ring-necked Duck
Surf Scoter (females only)
European Honey-buzzard*
MONTAGU'S HARRIER
ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD
Eurasian Hobby*
Common Crane*
STONE-CURLEW
Little (Ringed) Plover
KENTISH PLOVER
Pectoral Sandpiper*
Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Sabine's Gull
RING-BILLED GULL
HERRING GULL (yellow-legged
Races *MICHAHELLIS* and
CACHINNANS)
European Bee-eater
LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER
GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK
WOOD LARK
Richard's Pipit*
TAWNY PIPIT
WATER PIPIT
COMMON NIGHTINGALE
CETTI'S WARBLER
AQUATIC WARBLER
MARSH WARBLER
Icterine Warbler*
MELODIOUS WARBLER
DARTFORD WARBLER
Barred Warbler*
Pallas's Leaf Warbler*
Firecrest
Red-breasted Flycatcher*
WOODCHAT SHRIKE
EUROPEAN SERIN
Common Rosefinch
CIRL BUNTING
ORTOLAN BUNTING*
LITTLE BUNTING

Ron Forrester
Secretary, Scottish Birds Records Committee,
The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ

Twite Movements in Scotland

The research paper produced by H Clark & R M Sellers in *Scottish Birds* Winter 1998 is of much interest.

The species is comparatively scarce in the Upland Central areas of Scotland's moors and glens and I have noticed decreasing numbers of breeding pairs throughout North and South Loch Tay and Glen Dochart, Lochay and Lyon. This is possibly partly due to extra land being planted by conifer blankets and more stock of sheep and cattle placed on grazing ground.

At the end of June I began to look out for breeding pair with young and in Glen Lochay found 2 pairs each with 4 young, being fed on the ground, interrupted with short flights to perch on fences. By the end of the first week in July, the birds had flown, presumably to join up with a local flock. I found such a local flock of 100+ birds higher up the hill by the large quarry on the Tarmachan range in September 1997 and this year saw a flock of 50+ birds feeding by the roadside in north Argyll on 30 September.

Their sudden flight and wheelings are attractive and characteristic of the species and often they perch closely packed together on fence lines. Where do they go next? Does the weather and shorter daylight effect them and restrict their feeding?

In hard weather I have seen small flocks of 40/50 Twites in fields at Strath Tay and near Fortingall but only near turnip fields where the weeds have seeds suitable for feeding. In early spring, larger flocks of 500+ birds have been located on ploughed fields in the Carse of Lecropt, Stirling and again on grain fields where Wigeon were grazing at Cambesmore, Callander.

The subject matter is of continual interest.

Pat W Sandeman

Twite gathering *A D Johnson*

Charles Frank

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Charles Frank
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Feeding behaviour of Carrion Crow on juvenile Starling

At 10.20hrs on the 19 May 2000, when looking into an area of landscaped grass to the rear of my house, my attention was drawn to a frenzied congregation of approximately 30 juvenile and adult Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* which were uttering alarm calls and flying erratically into and around trees at the edge of the field. A large Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* close to the site of the Starling activity was indeed the focus of attention as it appeared to have killed a juvenile Starling.

With a telescope, I observed that the dead Starling was being carried around in the bill of the corvid. The Carrion Crow then dropped its prey and began to stab it with its bill, apparently to dismember it. Over the next 3 to 4 minutes, this activity was maintained, enabling the crow to completely remove one of the Starling's wings and an area of feathers. The Carrion Crow was clearly seen to be feeding on meat from the bird's breast.

Possibly the most interesting behavioural aspect of this macabre episode occurred after the Carrion Crow had removed the Starling's head. Momentarily, the remains of the kill was left and the corvid hopped a distance of approximately 6 to 7 metres with the head in its bill, deposited it behind a tuft of grass, then hopped back to its meal. After some 15 minutes (by which time most of the Starling had been eaten) it flew away with gaping throat, presumably to return to its young. Indeed, the literature (Coombs F 1978, *The Crows*, B T Batsford Ltd) states that such fresh meat is an important source of fluids for the young.

I was later told about a juvenile Blackbird *Turdus merula* which was killed by a Carrion Crow and carried off from the same site at which this incident occurred on 6 May 1999.

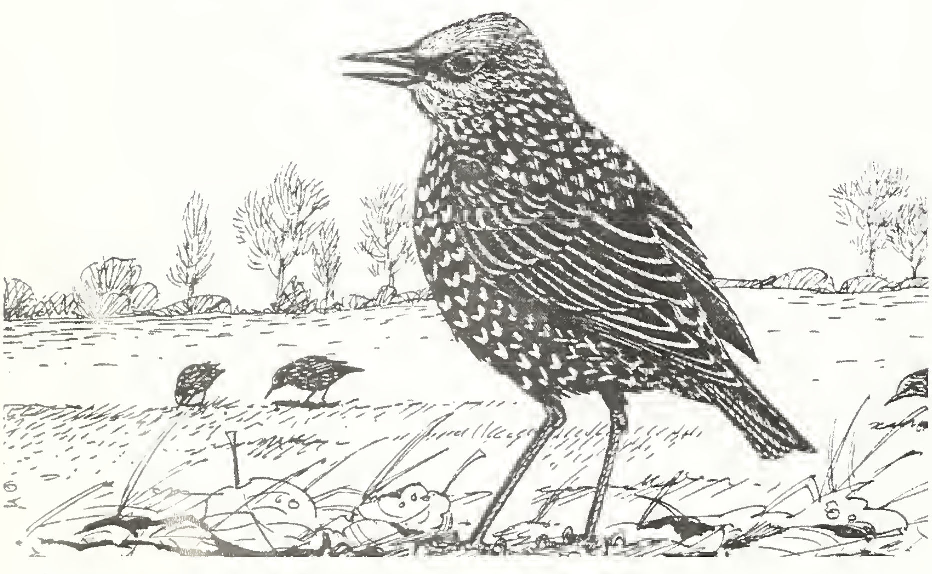
James Towell

Editor's notes on James Towill's 'Crow eating Starling' letter.

Although the predatory behaviour of Crows is well known, everybody likes a gruesome murder! By coincidence, I recorded a near-identical incident 3 years, almost to the day, earlier, outside my house in Winchburgh, West Lothian.

'22nd May 1997:
Unsavoury scenes outside the living room window this morning. As I was chewing determinedly at my Bran Flakes, I heard an awful commotion outside. Looking out, I saw a Crow holding a newly fledged juvenile Starling (first of the year) in its bill. The Starling was flapping its wings madly, trying to escape, but to no avail. At least 30 Starlings crowded round, mobbing the Crow and making plenty of noise. The Crow flew off to the rooftop opposite where, to the chagrin of the Starling, it dispatched the juvenile with a single blow to the head. Feathers scattered everywhere as it plucked the Starling's breast, and it was not long before bits of entrails were going into the Crow's crop or alternately, spilling down the roof. The Starling's head came off and rolled down the tiles into gutter, where a Jackdaw got it!

Other birds were hardly sympathetic - the local House Sparrows were scurrying around collecting stray feathers for their own nests. It looked like the juvenile Starling was being recycled around the estate! The pair of Woodpigeons from the Cypresses, perhaps curious, flew onto the roof to rubber-neck the whole incident.'.



Starling *D Mitchell*

Appeal for records of some common breeding species

A major part of the national Biodiversity initiative is a requirement that district councils produce action plans for the conservation of species considered to be in decline or of some special importance. These plans depend on knowledge of local distribution and in many cases the existing information is unsatisfactory.

It is noted that some records are understandably biased towards areas where observers live or visit regularly but that little information is sent in about the breeding distribution of widespread species – this is understandable since such records are unlikely to be quoted in the annual bird report. So the paradox results that we have quite systematic reporting of Grasshopper Warbler but nothing on Song Thrush or Yellowhammer unless someone is doing a special study, such as a Common Bird Census of a local area.
How you can help: Species marked as being of special conservation concern locally include: Grey Wagtail, Skylark, Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Reed Bunting; also relevant are Kestrel, Green Woodpecker, Wood Warbler, Starling, House Sparrow, Lesser Redpoll, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.

You may already have written notes for this year (2000) on some of these species. I should like to receive such records, preferably on the standard BTO record cards. For other species whose status during the breeding season is known, although no particular notes have been made, it ispossible to fill in a card as follows:
Date column: ignore Day & Month just say "spring" or "summer".
Location: Place name & Grid reference to the appropriate 1km square (eg Tillicoultry NS9292).
Notes and comments: it is important, as in the two previous national mapping surveys, to **distinguish possible breeding (b) from probable or confirmed breeding (B).**
Up to 10 records for any particular species can go on a single card; no need to fill in full address on more than one card per year!
Next year we should be able to produce sample maps on the CARSE system so all data will be useful. Please search your memories for this spring and summer. I am searching existing cards back to 1995, so any records you have back to this year are welcome.
Cards can be returned to me directly.

Cliff Henty 7b Coneyhill Road, Bridge of Allan FK9 4EL.

Living on the Edge - Birds 2000

118th meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in conjunction with the 19th annual meeting of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists and the British Ornithologists' Union.
Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada August 14 - 19, 2000

The first joint meeting of the AOU, the SCO and the BOU convened on the 14th of August 2000 in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Memorial University of Newfoundland hosted a six-day marathon of plenaries, symposia, presentations, workshops, committee meetings, field trips, film viewings and discussions. Under the banner of LIVING ON THE EDGE - BIRDS 2000, the conference was designed to explore the general theme of 'edges', and all at the edge of the new millennium of course! St. John's holds the title of the oldest city in North America and, perched on the edge of the North-west Atlantic, as far east as one can go on the continent, provided the perfect venue for such a theme. Throughout the week, delegates enjoyed the night life of St. John's with a boisterous traditional music scene and many fine pubs and restaurants to choose from.

More than 700 delegates, from five continents, attended the conference, which hosted more than 300 oral presentations and 100 poster presentations. The list included participants from all over North America, as well as many European countries, and some from as far away as Japan and Australia. Given the maritime location, and the conference theme, the programme showed a strong seabird component, with considerable input from the UK, especially Scotland. Each day of the meeting began with a plenary speaker who generally reviewed research to date on a particular topic and set the stage for the following symposium. Delegates had the option of attending the symposia or one of three concurrent oral presentation sessions. The afternoons were generally taken up with four concurrent oral presentation sessions each day.

In a week of blistering heat, extremely uncharacteristic of Newfoundland, the conference kicked off on the 14th with a day of workshops on a range of topics, including 'Ringing in the 21st Century', 'Conservation of Colonial Waterbirds' and 'Effects of Oil Pollution'. The workshops were followed by a 'Newfoundland Night' reception, an evening of welcome with local entertainers and culinary delights of the region, such as cod tongues. In addition, there were showings of the Canadian Coast Guard video 'No Second Chance' on the problem of oiled seabirds, and the BBC/ National Geographic production 'People of the Sea', a wonderful exploration of the North-west Atlantic ecosystem filmed entirely in and around Newfoundland.

On the 15th, the conference proper opened with a plenary lecture by Ian Newton, President of the BOU, on the subject of 'Population Limitation in Birds', which outlined their relevance for conservation and primed us for a symposium on 'Long-term Population Studies'. This symposium included presentations by Andrew Evans (RSPB) on Cirl Buntings and the recovery programme which aimed to recreate habitat in the wider countryside, and by Christopher Perrins (Edward Grey Institute, Oxford) on tit populations and ecosystem changes affecting woodland birds. The programme was opened on the 16th with a plenary by Susan Hannon (University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada) entitled 'Fragmentation Research in the Boreal Forest' which outlined pressures on the boreal forests of North America and the challenges faced in the conservation of woodland birds. This set the stage for a symposium on 'Fragmented Ecosystems - Conservation Risks and Strategies'. In the presentation sessions we heard from Keith Hamer (Durham University) on nestling obesity and the patterns of food provisioning in petrels.

The 17th was a free day, and many of the delegates enjoyed field trips to the Witless Bay and Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserves. Despite the thick fog along the coast, Atlantic Puffins, Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwakes, an occasional Humpback Whale and a pod of Killer Whales (a rare sight in these parts) entertained those who took the short bus ride and boat trips to Gull Island in Witless Bay. Braver souls who ventured out on the long bus ride to Cape St. Mary's were treated to fine views of Northern Gannets on the Cape's spectacular sea stack, known as 'Bird Rock'. Although none of these species will be unfamiliar to readers of *SBN*, they were much appreciated by the many delegates who live far from the Atlantic coast, some of whom had never seen the Atlantic before!

After this rejuvenating pause for fresh air, we leaped back into the scientific programme on the 18th with an opening plenary by Fred Cooke (Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada) entitled 'To Cull or Not to Cull: That is the Question', which explored conservation/ management questions in avian ecology, particularly the case of dramatically increasing Snow Goose populations. This paved the way for a symposium entitled 'Are Humans Edging Out Birds? - Conflicts and Resolutions'. This symposium included presentations by Chris Feare (Wild Wings, Haslemere) on establishing sustainable harvests and monitoring of Sooty Terns in the Seychelles, and by Rhys Green (RSPB) on attempts to limit intensification of agricultural practices and prevent further declines in farmland-dependent birds. Of note in the afternoon sessions were fine presentations by Francis Daunt, who described the outcome of an experimental investigation of age-specific reproduction performance in Shags, and Suzanne Finney, who explained the results of an experimental test of two gull control strategies and their effects on gull-puffin interactions, both of Glasgow University. The last day, the 19th, started with a fascinating plenary by John Croxall (British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge) entitled 'Seabird Ranges and Oceanic Habitats - Remote Tracking in the Service of Marine Conservation', in which he outlined the type of information gained in recent years via the technological revolution in satellite telemetry . This certainly got the braincells working again for the symposium on 'Birds Foraging at Sea - Performance Indicators of Prey and Oceanographic Changes'. The symposium included presentations by Sarah Wanless (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Banchory) on the at-sea activity of Kittiwakes and Guillemots in an area of the North Sea exploited by a sandeel fishery, and by Keith Hamer who detailed information on foraging and food provisioning strategies of Northern Gannets gained by satellite tracking.

The conference ended with a banquet (with at least one kilt in evidence) and the traditional speeches and thanks. Dr. Jamie Smith was honoured by the Society of Canadian Ornithologists with the Doris Heustis Speirs Award. Jamie, who was born on the Isle of Bute (1944) and graduated in Zoology from Edinburgh University (1967), is a well-established faculty member at the University of British Columbia . The award recognised Jamie's significant contribution to ornithology, particularly his long-term studies of population dynamics in Song Sparrows and their interactions with the brood parasite, the Brown-headed Cowbird. Frank Gill, President of the AOU, thanked the committees involved in preparing and organising the meeting, particularly Dr. Bill Montevecchi of Memorial University, the driving force behind the St. John's meeting. Bill, his support staff and a broad-based local committee, co-chaired by Dr. Jim Carscadden (Dept. of Fisheries & Oceans, St. John's) and John Maunder (Newfoundland Museum), did a wonderful job with what was praised by many as the "best ever" ornithological meeting they had attended! In its closing, the meeting was considered a great success, with many delegates promising that it wouldn't be long until they visited Newfoundland again.

We look forward to seeing them!
Iain J. Stenhouse, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Scottish Breeding Bird Survey

The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is an annual line transect survey of birds, organised by the BTO, that has been running since 1994. The aim of the survey is to monitor the populations of our more common birds by enlisting the help of volunteer birdwatchers, who survey one (or more) 1 km squares every year. The BBS covers the whole of the UK but is designed so that the results can be broken down for different geographical areas, habitats or species. In this way, the survey is able to report on the population changes for many of Scotland's common birds.

The results displayed here are for the 57 species of bird that were found in at least 30 BBS squares annually, from 1994 to 1999. The between-year change (1998-99) gives us an indication of the previous year's breeding performance and the effects of recent weather conditions. The longer-term trend (1994-99) is a better indication of overall population change due to factors such as changes in habitat quality and other human-related influences, although ideally more years of data are needed to confirm these patterns. Those species increasing or decreasing significantly are marked with an asterisk. Non-significant results offer an indication of each species' fortunes, but the data are too variable or the sample size is too small. Nine species decreased significantly, including four waders (Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Curlew and Golden Plover) as well as Pheasant and Black-headed Gull. Kestrel, Skylark and Meadow Pipit also declined, mirroring the results across the UK. Twelve species increased significantly including Buzzard, Red Grouse and Feral Pigeon. The fortunes of the latter species may not surprise many people but we actually know very little about this species since it is largely ignored by birdwatchers and surveys alike. Nonetheless, it is clearly important to monitor all species (wild or not) especially when this might have a bearing on the populations of other birds. Among the other increasing species, several are small birds such as Robin, Wren, Goldcrest and Great Tit that are benefiting from recent relatively mild winters. Migrant breeders such as Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler and House Martin also appear to be faring well, the latter particularly so.

Monitoring populations of breeding birds is the first step in the conservation process that allows us to identify increases or decreases and help target research. One important feature of the BBS is that we are able to compare results from different habitats and regions. If a species is faring better in one part of the country than another, this could mean that conditions have become more favourable, for breeding success or for survival. For example, House Martin, Willow Warbler and Reed Bunting appear to be faring much better in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. Willow Warblers could well be benefiting from the amounts of suitable nesting habitat such as young forestry. As more data are collected each year, we hope to be able to provide useful information for conservation efforts.

The quality of the survey results depends on

Table1. ***Species recorded in at least 30 squares in Scotland over the period 1994 to 1999. The figures presented are the percentage changes in population levels for 1998-1999, and 1994 to 1999, marked with an asterisk where significant at a 5% level.***

Species	**Sample**	**Change 98-99**	**Change 94-99**
Grey Heron	40	10	83*
Mallard	85	53	73*
Buzzard	89	5	44*
Kestrel	42	-55	-61*
Red Grouse	61	-7	46*
Pheasant	99	-16	-27*
Oystercatcher	118	-1	-54*
Golden Plover	49	-35	-33*
Lapwing	87	-8	-34*
Snipe	55	18	39
Curlew	125	-6	-18*
Common Sandpiper	38	-34	-30
Black-headed Gull	75	5	-59*
Common Gull	69	-18	-16
Lesser Black-backed Gull	58	-22	3
Herring Gull	98	-14	6
Great Black-backed Gull	35	4	41
Feral Pigeon	51	19	44*
Wood Pigeon	156	13	-7
Collared Dove	35	-25	-16
Cuckoo	68	-27	-10
Swift	40	-3	-28
Skylark	194	-19	-13*
Swallow	128	7	1
House Martin	41	112	375*
Meadow Pipit	205	-24*	-17*
Pied Wagtail	116	1	23
Wren	175	1	60*
Dunnock	97	-19	9
Robin	150	-6	17*
Whinchat	33	-11	2
Wheatear	78	-41*	-2
Blackbird	142	7	4
Song Thrush	128	21	20
Mistle Thrush	57	-9	29
Sedge warbler	49	34	39*
Whitethroat	53	-20	3
Willow Warbler	176	-16	43*
Goldcrest	69	-10	87*
Coal Tit	97	-34	-10
Blue Tit	118	6	9
Great Tit	102	-12	31*
Magpie	31	-29	19
Jackdaw	90	-3	4
Rook	98	-6	-6
Carrion Crow	147	0	2
Raven	40	-16	19
Starling	117	8	22
House Sparrow	72	9	9
Chaffinch	192	-8	1
Greenfinch	79	11	30
Goldfinch	55	-6	1
Siskin	58	-2	-6
Linnet	75	-35	1
Lesser Redpoll	38	-16	-9
Yellowhammer	86	-7	-13
Reed Bunting	39	23	40

Wren on Speyside. This delightful photograph taken by Eric McCabe won first prize in the Photographich Competiton at the 2000 SOC Annual Conference.

the level of coverage. We are fortunate to have so many volunteer birdwatchers in Scotland to make this sort of survey possible. Coverage is excellent in many areas but, following the cessation of funding for professional fieldworkers in 1999, parts of the far north are not covered. Despite the tremendous effort by our BBS Regional Organisers and volunteers, the total number of squares covered has dropped to 267 in 1999 from 307 in 1998. This was not altogether unexpected since many of the squares in question are extremely remote. There are, however, a good number of squares in more accessible areas for which we are keen to find volunteers.

Our thanks go to all volunteers involved with the Scottish BBS many of whom are SOC members. However, in order to maintain and improve this important work, we would be grateful to hear from more volunteers. If you would like to help, please contact **Richard Bashford, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU Tel (01842) 750050, Fax (01842) 750030 or email bbs@bto.org**

Richard Bashford

Black Grouse lekking. Numbers of Black Grouse lekking in the Forest of Birse, Aberdeenshire have remained stable at 16 birds over the last 2 breeding seasons. Dennis Johnson

Monitoring bird numbers in the Forest of Birse, Aberdeenshire, in 2000

Counts of breeding birds in the upper Feugh, reported for 1987-99 by Jenkins & Watson *Scottish Birds* 20:81-93 continued in 2000 with the same observer (DJ), area and methods.

In 2000, Shaila Rao found nests or nest sites of Lapwings and Oystercatchers on area M-O, checking DJ's long-distance counts. The 2 agreed exactly for Lapwings, with 13 pairs. Nine clutches found all hatched; they were in rough or boggy ground around the edge of the pasture in places little affected by agriculture. Another 4 on Q were disturbed by scarifying and liming while nesting. DJ's Oystercatcher counts exceeded the nest counts, because several pairs did not nest or failed early. Each week he saw groups of up to 6-8 in addition to birds on 4 mid-field or roadside nests/sites at M-O and at another site at Q, and no known clutch hatched. He saw 14 adults at M-O in mid August, which is late (most leave Deeside by mid July), so some may have re-nested after the study period ended on 30 June.

In 1987-99 a Common Gull colony on the study area became extinct, and Goosanders, Oystercatchers and Cuckoos declined significantly (Jenkins & Watson 1999). Goosanders and Cuckoos have continued to decline, with no Goosander pair seen and only one Cuckoo singing persistently (Table 1). No Tree Pipit or Yellowhammer bred in 2000. The Yellowhammer decline may be more widespread, because from roads and tracks DJ hears only one singing in the Finzean area lower down Feughside where they were widespread in the mid 1990s.

In 1987-99, 10 species increased significantly (Jenkins &Watson 1999). With 2000 data included, this result was maintained, and in addition Wrens and Linnets ($P<0.05$) and Sand Martins($P<0.02$) increased significantly over the study years. Lapwings recovered from a decrease since 1997. A new Black-headed Gull colony formed on moorland by Q. A Common Gull colony on Lamahip, a hill north of the study area, increased greatly, and a few Herring Gulls, recorded since the early 1990s summered.

Lekking Blackcocks numbered 37 on the study area in 1987, but only 16 in 1999 and 2000. However, the 37 included a temporary lek of 11 cocks at M-O, which declined to 3 in 1988-92, then 2, and eventually one or none. In the early to mid 90s, apparently new leks were found on nearby Lamahip, with 7 and 10 cocks in 2000. Hence the local population is thought to be stable.

We thank Ballogie head keeper, George Nicol and Robin Callander for information on Blackcock and Common Gull, Shaila Rao for finding wader nests, and Forest of Birse Estate for a grant towards expenses.

For species not listed, no birds were seen in either year.

Table 1 ***Number of territories, based on number of singing passerines, lekking Blackcock, duck pairs and gulls nests to the nearest 5.***

	1999	2000
Mallard	3	3
Goosander	2	0
Black Grouse	16	16
Oystercatcher	7	10
Lapwing	11	17
Curlew	11	12
Common Sandpiper	0	2
Black-headed Gull	10	80
Woodpigeon	9	13
Cuckoo	2	1
Sand Martin	6	40
Swallow	6	8
Tree Pipit	23	27
Meadow Pipit	23	27
Grey Wagtail	11	13
Pied Wagtail	13	16
Dipper	9	5
Wren	92	99
Dunnock	24	28
Robin	76	71
Redstart	5	4
Whinchat	13	18
Stonechat	5	5
Blackbird	3	4
Song Thrush	28	20
Mistle Thrush	12	8
Chiffchaff	1	0
Willow Warbler	106	37
Spotted Flycatcher	16	10
Long-tailed Tit	1	3
Blue Tit	16	15
Great Tit	22	13
Treecreeper	14	15
Starling	2	6
House Sparrow	2	1
Chaffinch	110	92
Linnet	10	12
Yellowhammer	5	0

David Jenkins & Adam Watson

Inchgarth Nature Reserve in 2000

Summer 2000 saw the start of serious management work at Inchgarth – not by people, but by cattle. Up to 11 cows and 5 calves spent from June to September grazing down the rank grass, trampling the rushes and generally creating muddy edges to the pool. The photograph shows some of the Highland cows used by the local farmer, and they seemed to enjoy being there; they certainly looked the part. We could probably have used even more cattle, since there was a great deal of remedial grazing to be done. But the reserve is looking in much better shape than it did a year ago.

The pool held water well throughout the summer and was used a great deal by small numbers of Mallard, Teal and Moorhen. Herons were frequent visitors in early spring, feeding on spawning frogs. We have been monitoring the change in water levels to help understand the natural fluctuations in this floodplain grassland.

No waders bred this year, though a pair of Redshanks showed interest early in the season. Other breeding birds included Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit, Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler, and a range of butterflies and dragonflies was seen. Wader and duck numbers should now be building up for the winter, and we expect to see lots of Common Snipe and some Jack Snipe as the season progresses. We plan to fence off a small corner of the reserve and sow a wild bird cover crop. This will be about an acre, comprising a mixture of cereals, rape, kale, mustard and weeds, designed to attract seed-eating birds. It should be ready for consumption by winter 2001-2002, so watch this space!

[See SBN 58 for an introduction to the reserve)

Ian Francis
on behalf of the SOC Grampian Branch

Highland cows grazing the pool vegetation at Inchgarth Reserve.

Ian Francis

Mute Swan Census 2001

A national census of the Mute Swan population in Great Britain is to take place in spring 2001. This census will update information from the last survey in 1990 (*Scottish Birds* 17:2, December 1993) and, as with previous surveys, will specifically seek to determine the size of the population and identify its territorial, breeding and non-breeding components.

As in 1983 and 1990, we are co-ordinating the Scottish part of the census, which is being jointly organised by WWT, BTO, SOC and the Swan Study Group (SSG). Survey methods will be similar to previous surveys, requiring observers to record the numbers of territorial and breeding pairs (in April/May) and the size of the non-breeding flocks (in mid-April) in 10-km squares of the national grid. We hope to obtain as full coverage of Scotland as possible but WWT/BTO are also devising a sampling strategy based on coverage of key 10-km squares known to hold large numbers of swans and where coverage can be guaranteed, in addition to a random sample of other 10-km squares.

Fuller details of the survey and names of local organisers will appear in the Spring 2001 edition of *SBN* but we would be delighted to hear from anyone who may be interested in helping with the survey in their area. We will pass details on to the relevant local organiser. Indeed we will be especially interested to learn of sites which hold flocks in April to ensure that these sites are covered in 2001. We know from our own long-term studies in Lothians and Fife that the Mute Swan population has increased considerably in those areas since 1990, with a number of new flock sites established. The 2001 census will provide the opportunity to assess whether such growth and expansion into new areas or habitats has occurred elsewhere in Scotland.

Even if you cannot help directly by covering a specific 10-km square, any records of territorial or breeding pairs and April flocks of Mute Swans recorded from anywhere in Scotland in 2001 will be gratefully received.

Allan & Lyndesay Brown,
61 Watt's Gardens,
Cupar, Fife KY15 4UG
Tel: 01334 656804
e-mail:swans@allanwbrown.co.uk

Gathering of Swans *Fred Wescott*

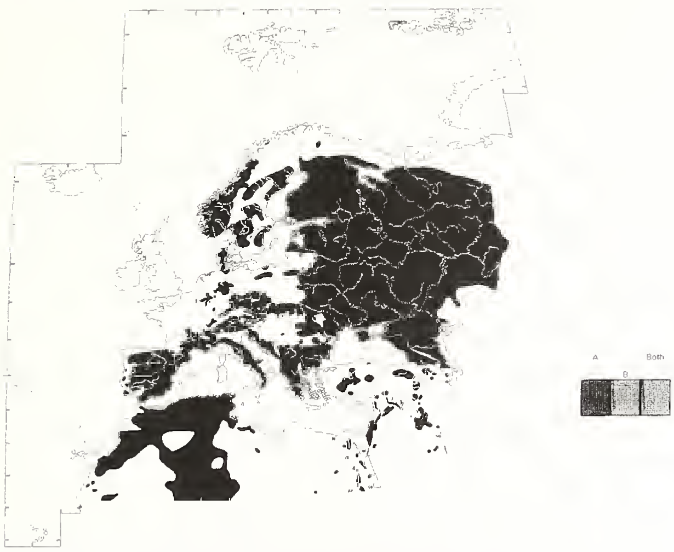
Eagle Owls

Although all occurrences of Eagle Owl in Britain are assumed (or proven) to relate to escapees, there is increasing evidence that the species may be increasing as a feral breeder. The effect on our native fauna if it were to be established are uncertain, but Eagle Owls have a ferocious reputation for eating birds and mammals as large as a wild boar, and for clearing all other species of owl out of their territories. The recent report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (Ogilvie et al. (2000) Non-native birds breeding in the United Kingdom in 1998. Brit. Birds 93, 428-433) reports that an adult called throughout January 1998 at a locality where a nest scrape was made in 1997). Much to the consternation of local dog walkers, an escaped Eagle Owl took up residence at Newburgh Quarry, Fife, in 1999 (Fife Bird Report), and there are now estimated to be about 20 birds at large in Britain. 1998 was the third year running that a pair bred successfully in northern England (fledging two young). If the Eagle Owl was ever a native bird, it appears not to have recolonised after the glaciations; many ornithologists, including Chris Mead, have stated that the extant British birds should be trapped or killed before they get the chance to do any real harm.

Is it possible that any of the birds have reached Britain naturally? They are largely regarded as sedentary in Europe, although several significant movements of more than 200 km are recorded in BWP, and 50% of young birds in Norway are recovered more than 75 km from their birthplace. Clearly, vagrancy to Britain is not altogether unlikely, but, even allowing for under-recording of nocturnal species, the lack of records at coastal observatories sugggests that it is not occurring regularly. Perhaps the Eagle Owl is destined to be another Black Woodpecker, forever knocking at the door of the British list? That is, unless the feral birds become self-supporting.

(figure of range of Eagle Owl showing proximity to Scotland)

Range of Eagle Owl in the Western Palearctic



Reproduced from BWP CD-ROM (Oxford University Press)

World Birding Conference – birders contributing to global bird conservation

30 March – 1 April 2001. The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. A conference hosted jointly by African Bird Club, British Ornithologists' Union, British Trust for Ornithology, Neotropical Bird Club and Oriental Society of the Middle East.

Those who attended the first World Birding Conference in 1997 will be keen to book for a repeat programme of talks looking at the contribution birders have made, and continue to make, to global bird conservation.

A programme of internationally renowned speakers has been put together to illustrate the contributions birders continue to make to global bird conservation and highlight new opportunities for today's globetrotting birder.

These include:

- Ian Wallace, a master of words and imagery, will look at the contribution that birdwatching pioneers have made to our knowledge and to bird conservation
- Nigel Collar (BirdLife International) will offer up challenges for those who want to make a name for themselves by highlighting areas of the world that remain largely unexplored in birding and ornithological terms, and where new species are most likely to be occur
- Marianne Dunn (BP/BirdLife) will provide an insight to BP's Conservation Programme of global expeditions and the benefit such projects bring to conservation
- Will Cresswell (Oxford University) an experienced expedition leader, will offer practical advice on gathering data in the field using the wonders of modern technology
- Keith Betton (African Bird Club and ABTA) will bombard us with weird and wonderful birds sounds from around the world
- Stewart White (University of Glasgow) an experienced expedition leader, will provide practical advice on the pros and cons of organising an expedition using his recent expedition – Ecuador 2000 – as an example
- Richard Ranft (The British Library National Sound Archive) will cover different aspects of bird sounds and their recording
- Melanie Heath (BirdLife International) will tell us about BirdLife's latest flagship project – Important Bird Areas
- Robert Prys Jones (Natural History Museum Bird Group) will illustrate the different uses and roles museums can have for global bird conservation
- Steve Dudley (British Ornithologists' Union) will look at the 143 years the BOU has been contributing to ornithology and global bird conservation
- Andrew Grieve (Oriental Society of the Middle East) will talk about a DIY survey of the northern Red Sea
- Guy Kirwan (Oriental Society of the Middle East) will illustrate the challenges facing birders and conservationists in Turkey
- Hazell Thompson (African Bird Club) will inform us about the conservation role ABC plays in Africa
- Chris Wernham (British Trust for Ornithology) will tell us about the BTO's Migration Atlas project and the importance of ringing as a monitoring tool
- plus other speakers and talks including conservation work in the Neotropics (Neotropcial Bird Club talk) and a further look at the work of BirdLife International.

With a full programme of talks, as well as time to explore the many other conference attractions such as a bookshop (Subbuteo Books), an internet bookstore (NHBS.com), a multi-media store of CD, video and CD-ROM titles (WildSounds), a second hand bookshop (Second Nature), club displays (including ABC, BOU, BTO, NBC and OSME), holiday companies, optics and much, much more – the weekend looks as if it will be as vibrant and inspiring as the first World Birding Conference.

More information about the weekend can be found on the WBC website – www.wbc2.com or contact - ***WBC2, c/o BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU***
Tel: 01842 750050
Email: sue.starling@bto.org

2000 Bay of Biscay Cetacean & Bird Records

A Bay of Biscay Cetacean and Bird Records committee has been formed under the auspices of ORCA (Organisation Cetacea). Would anybody with records from this area please send them to Cetaceans - Caroline Still, 4 Waldeck Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR4 7PG or Birds - Dave Gray, 45 Western Park Road, Leicester LE3 6H Q. e-mail David.GRAY@students.dmu.ac.uk.
Written descriptions are required for Fea's Petrel, Little Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater, Bulwers Petrel, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Madeiran Storm Petrel, all Albatrosses, Long-tailed Skua and Roseate Tern.

Bird of Prey Persecution still at High Levels

In October, RSPB Scotland released 'Persecution - A Review of Bird of Prey Persecution in Scotland in 1999' - its 6th annual report on the subject. Fourteen confirmed poisonings were reported to the Society during the year, with 7 other confirmed persecution incidents, 19 probable and 44 possible persecution incidents. The total compares favourably with the 107 equivalent reports in 1998, and although it is hoped that this downward trend is to continue, the news so far from 2000 is not good: Stuart Housden, Director of RSPB Scotland, said that there have been 19 confirmed poisoning incidents reported, including Golden Eagles and Red Kites among the victims.

Sarah Boyack, Minister for Transport and the Environment, said: 'I am pleased to support the RSPB's publication of their report of bird of prey persecution in Scotland. However, I am saddened and appalled that there is an ongoing need for such a report. The persecution of wild birds cannot be tolerated and I have in the past made public my sympathy with those who have called for greater powers to be made available to the Courts when dealing with individuals whose selfish actions undermine the conservation efforts of many. I am developing a policy statement which will include proposals to better protect Scotland's Natural Heritage. I will propose measures to make life tougher for wildlife criminals with the prospect of custodial sentences for habitual offenders.'

(Photograph - Kestrel, one of the victims of Bird of Prey persecution which still persists in Scotland)

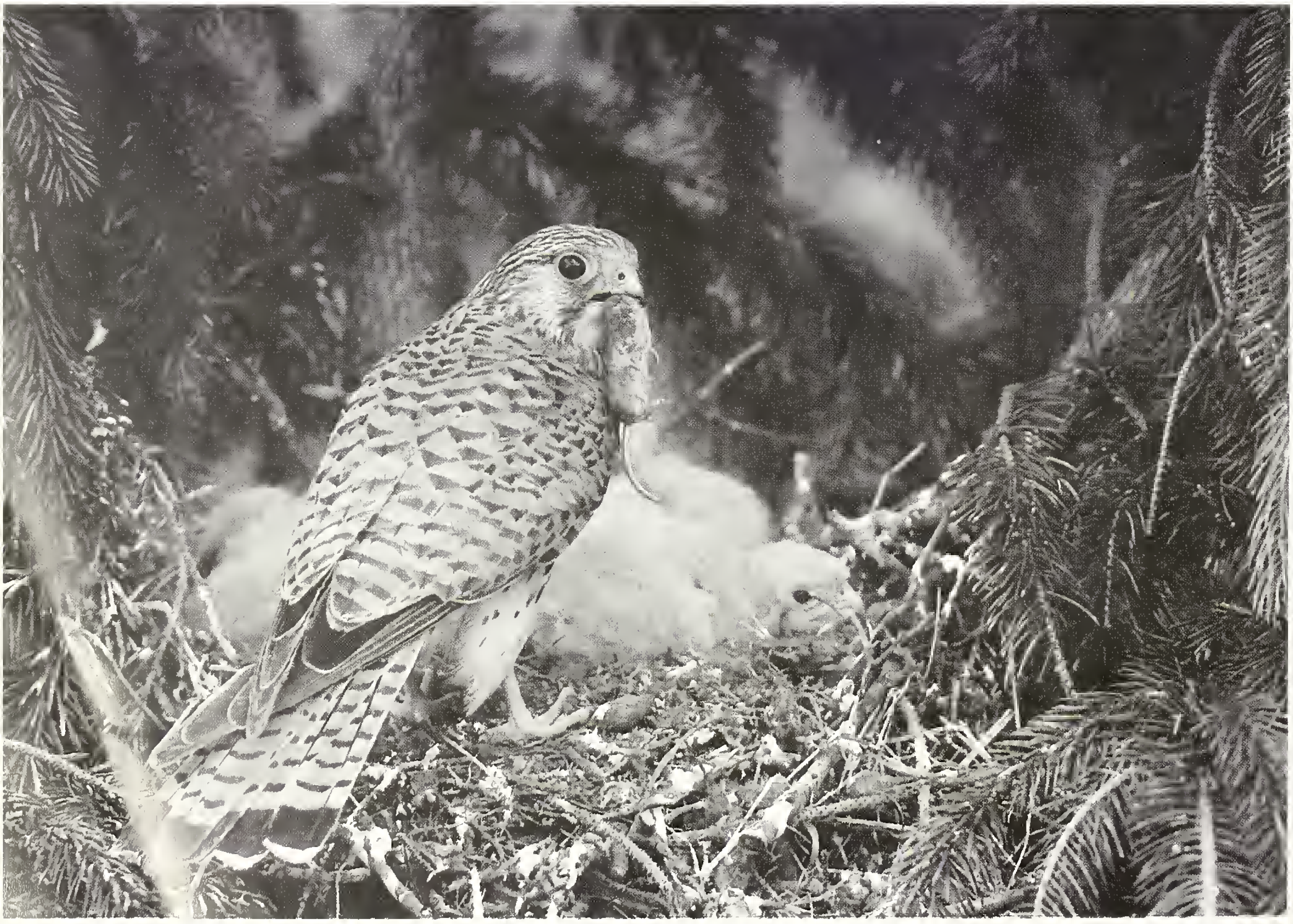
LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I have followed the correspondence by Les Hatton, Shirley Millar and Andrew Macmillan concerning the results of Constant Effort Site monitoring in Fife and Lothian, in particular, Hatton and Millar's "struggle" to find a way of identifying statistical significance when the BTO Guide *Statistics for Ornithologists* appears to have let them down (*Scottish Bird News* **58**, June 2000).

Presuming that their interpretation of "significance" is that changes in the sample data truly reflect changes in the wild populations, rather than chance sampling effects, the problem is that no "significance" can be attached to a single observation. Thus, 6 declined to 1, full stop. However there are ways of assessing chance effects with larger sets of data. For example, observations from several successive years can be analysed by a test for a trend by the Spearman Rank test (BTO Stats. Guide, 2nd Edition, Section 12.6). Alternatively, rather than aggregating the data from 5 CES sites, the five observations from one year could be compared with a parallel sample of 5 observations from the following year by means of a Mann-Whitney U-test (BTO Guide Section14.3) or even the Wilcoxon test for matched pairs (since one site can be matched with itself the next year), Section 14.7.

Jim Fowler



Kestrel feeding young

E C Fellowes

REVIEWS

***Orkney Nature** by R J Berry, 2000. Poyser Natural History. 308pp. ISBN 0-85661-104-2. £24.95, hardback.*

This well written and copiously illustrated book is a reworking of Professor Berry's 'The Natural History of Orkney' in the New Naturalist series, which is now out of print. In his introduction (or 'Apologia') he describes himself as the compiler of the book, and acknowledges contributions from various others, which he has worked together in a consistent style. The source for the chapter on birds, which is presumably the main interest of SBN readers, is Eric Meek. This, at 33 pages the longest chapter in the book, seems to be the best summary description available, and (like all the chapters) includes a good bibliography. This book is produced to Poyser's customary high standards. All those familiar with the Orkneys will want to look at it, and not solely for the chapter on birds.

***Shrikes & Bush-Shrikes**. Tony Harris and Kim Franklin. Christopher Helm, London (August 2000). 392 pages, 41 colour plates, 27 line drawings, 13 figures. ISBN 0 7136 3861 3. £35 (hardback)*

This latest volume in the Helm series covers 114 species from 21 genera, representing 30 species (three genera) of the "true shrikes" (Laniidae) and 84 species (18 genera) of the "bush-shrikes" (Malaconotidae). The systematic combination of shrikes and bush-shrikes blends the more traditional view of the Laniidae and Malaconotidae as sister taxa, with that generated from the results from DNA-DNA hybridisation studies. Thus, accurate coverage of the re-assessed bush-shrikes and their allies is provided. However, it should be remembered that the association of this group with the true shrikes is not as close as previously thought (DNA work places them in the Corvidae), while Ward's Flycatcher and the vangas of Madagascar (the sister tribe of the Malaconotini from DNA work) are excluded.

The book has originated from the first author's passion for shrikes and their allies, with twenty years of personal experience, particularly in southern Africa. The level of research is reflected by the 1086 references, occupying 24 pages at the rear of the book. In contrast to other Helm publications, numbers are used as superscripts to denote references at relevant points in the text, though these are rather small. The appendices deal with species limits, relationships and comparative characters. The scope of this book is therefore broader than that of Lefranc & Worfolk's 1997 Pica Press publication, which concentrated solely on the "true shrikes". The species order differs slightly from that volume, as do some common names.

The introductory chapters move from a brief history of shrikes to a general appraisal of their characteristics and then an overview of their classification. This in turn leads to a detailed section emphasising the importance of communication, both visual and acoustic, in shrike behaviour and its inferred importance in deciphering relationships. The short accounts of the 21 genera that follow, accompanied by pleasant, lively sketches, are a delightful and concise introduction, in particular for the bush-shrikes, that are poorly represented in the Western Palaearctic (just a single species, Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegala*). Taxonomic uncertainties are identified, such as the rare Mount Kupé Bush Shrike *Chlorophoneus? kupeensis* from Cameroon, which in the author's view is best treated as the only representative of an as yet unnamed genus. The Blackcap Bush-Shrike *Antichromus minuta* is returned to its original genus from its more recent placement within *Tchagra*. The Uhehe Fiscal *Lanius marwitzi* (e.g. Lefranc & Worfolk) is absorbed within Common Fiscal, while sixteen *Batis* species are listed, a complex and conservative group representing (with Laniarius) the second-largest genus after *Lanius*. The infamous Bulo Burti Boubou is described, although the author clearly feels that its promotion to full species status, based primarily on DNA data, may be premature.

Individual accounts are restricted to a maximum of about five pages per species, although those for the true shrikes average nearly a page longer, presumably because of their long-term popular appeal and relative ease of observation. The accounts for the Malaconotidae represent a benchmark for a group greatly deserving of wider appreciation, with plenty of scope for further study. I found the emphasis on behaviour most enjoyable, this tying in with the author's clear dedication and also the due respect given to birdwatchers in discovering new aspects pertinent to our greater understanding, whether it refers to their classification, their behaviour or both. The loud vocalisations of many of the Malaconotidae, that includes many duetting species, are often remarkable and may come as a surprise to European birdwatchers, as there is little familiar with which to compare them. Melodious, piping, mournful and ringing whistles are used, many of which are liable to changes in pitch, tempo and amplitude, along with husky, croaking, slashing, whooping, guttural, bubbling, tearing and rasping calls, not to mention bill-clashing, tongue-clicking and wing-fripping! These birds, though often skulking and shade-loving, soon become enchanting and their often stunning plumage is well worth the wait.

The well-drawn plates are slightly disappointing, as reproduction seems overly dark, with the species of greatest personal familiarity coming across as rather drab. The darkness of the reproduction in my opinion is further enhanced by the use of white as a background, though the inclusion of other features helps the artist's style take on more life.

In short, if the reader is interested solely in the Laniidae, then either this volume or Lefranc and Worfolk will suffice. However, for a broader, behaviour-based review of these enigmatic birds and particularly the Malaconotidae, this book is a useful if somewhat pricey purchase.

Bob Dawson

Snipes of the Western Palearctic

The above book, a collaboration between OMPO (Oiseaux Migrateurs du PalÈarctique Occidental) and Editions Eveil-Nature is now available, priced FFr 190. By synthesizing the existing bibliography and demography of snipes, and management techniques for their habitats, this book represents a serious attempt to compile the existing knowledge of these species. It will serve as a basis for future research and the development of a strategy for their conservation. OMPO is an international non-governmental organisation involved in conservation of migratory birds and their habitats on the large biogeographic scale in the Western Palearctic. Write to ***Editions Eveil-Nature, 10 rue Evariste Poitevin, 16710 Saint- Yrieix, France. email evielnature@hotmail.com***

***Cuckoos, Cowbirds & Other Cheats.** N B Davies. T & A D Poyser (London) 2000. 310 pages, 8 colour plates, b+w illustrations by David Quinn. ISBN 0-85661-135-2. £24.95.*

This book won the *British Birds* 'Bird Book Book of the Year' competition by a mile. At the award ceremony, Jeremy Greenwood asserted that he had sat down and read the book from start to finish without being able to put it down. I had assumed that this was a blatant, if well meaning, fib, so was astonished to find myself similarly glued to this amazing series of murder-mysteries. The plots are not spoiled by our knowing the identity of the culprits.

After a brief introduction to the variety of birds which facultatively or opportunistically lay their eggs in the nests of other species, the reader is taken step-by-step through the breeding biology of Common Cuckoos and their hosts. At every stage, our assumptions about their interactions are challenged and redirected, and Davies is clearly on home ground on subject matter which has been the basis of his academic career. We are then taken on a tour through a selection of the rest of the World's cuckoos, including the 'non-evicting' versions such as the Great Spotted Cuckoo - the similarities and differences between their lifestyles, together with the paradoxes and questions they raise, are explained. Lengthy chapters on the different species of cowbird, their interactions and evolution, leave us worrying about the apparent inevitability of an attempted colonisation by the Brown-headed Cowbird. Just when the reader thinks there can be no more twists or surprises, we are introduced to the *Vidua* finches - whose fledglings mimic the gape patterns of their Estrildid finch hosts, even though fledglings with mis-matching patterns are accepted and fed.

The quality of the writing never dips, although some of the sparkle fades in the sections about which, one suspects, Davies has had less first-hand experience. You never knew how much you didn't know...Why does provisions of next-boxes for Wood Ducks threaten local extinctions? When is it better for a host species to accept a parasite's egg than to reject? Who are the Mafia of the bird world? How come that parasitic nestlings don't imprint on their hosts? Why do nesting Snow Geese fight off itinerant females by then actively accept their egg? You have to get this book - just make sure you have clean underwear on when you start reading, as it may by a while before you get out of the settee.

Martin Collinson.

Ecuador and its Galapagos Islands - The Ecotravellers' Wildlife Guide *by David L Pearson & Les Beletsky. Academic Press 2000. 485pp, 96 colour plates, numerous colour photos, figures and maps. Species and general index. ISBN 0-12-084814-7 (pbk) £19.95.*

Having recently returned from a wonderful trip to both areas, the arrival of this book just prior to departure could not have been better timed. This compact and easily portable volume follows the same format as the earlier guides. Chapters deal with essential topics such as the geography, habitats, climate, parks and nature reserves. The bulk of the book is devoted to the species groups - Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds, Mammals, Insects and other Arthropods. A final chapter covers Galapagos Wildlife. The colour plates are well drawn and generally accurate, but naturally illustrate only a fraction of the recorded species for this immensely rich area. Inevitably species you cannot recognise will not be depicted! Having said that I would not be without this useful guide in my day pack, particularly for the non-avian species with which I am not too familiar.

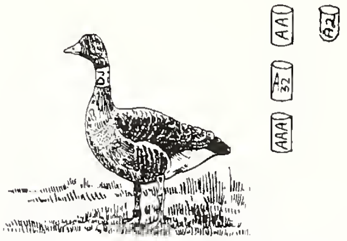
This is clearly a well researched and easily read book and a very welcome additon to this relatively new series.

David Clugston

REQUESTS

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR Tel: 01862 894329 email Bob.Swann@hcs.uhi.ac.uk.**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

East Sutherland Stonechats

The Highland Ringing Group Bulletin for September reminds us to look out for colour-ringed Stonechats over the winter. Birds from a defined breeding area at Loch Shin have been fitted with a combination of rings: adults carry a white ring over metal on the right leg, and an individual combination of three rings on the left leg; each year's juveniles are marked with a single year colour on the left leg. If a bird is seen, a grid reference and any notes on behaviour / other birds present etc. are requested by Lyn Wells and David Patterson. Thirteen adults were ringed this year, and 65 pulli, from 16 active territories (cf. 10 in 1999). It is intended to continue the study in the summer of 2001, hoping to see the return of colour-marked individuals to the site. This should give an indication of site-fidelity between seasons.

Colour ringed Dunlin

Since 1997 we have been colour ringing breeding adult and pullus Dunlin at various locations in Orkney. All birds ringed as adults are identifiable as individuals. On the right leg there is a yellow colour ring above the knee, and two colour rings below the knee. The left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. The chicks also have a yellow colour ring above the knee on the right leg and the left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. Birds ringed as chicks are only identifiable as to the year in which they were ringed. Even if the combinations are incomplete, we would be grateful for all sightings of birds that have a YELLOW colour ring above the knee on the right leg. All sightings should be sent to either **Stuart Williams Crafty, Firth, Orkney KW17 2ES Tel: 0185676 1742 email Stuart@gavia.freeserve.co.uk, or Jim Williams, Fairholm, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EQ Tel: 0185676 1317** Acknowledgement will be sent along with full history of the bird.

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to: **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

SOC car stickers

Ian Andrews has designed a smart new car sticker featuring the Club's new logo. These can be purchased from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, at 50pence each plus a second class stamp.

SOC NOTICES

Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the volunteers who give assistance in the office, and also those who came in to assist in despatching the June mailing. If you would like to help with this task, please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on **0131 556 6042** for details.

2001 SOC/BTO Birdwatchers' Conference

Borders branch of the SOC are organising the 2001 spring conference which will be held on 17 March 2001 at the Heriot Watt University, Galashiels. Booking form enclosed with this issue.

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 2000 were:

July - 1st £30 D Shepherd, Dundee; 2nd £20 M Bickmore, Selkirk; 3rd £10 J Walker, Leeds.
August - 1st £50 C McLellan, Peebles; 2nd £30 S Jackson, Falmouth; 3rd £20 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 4th £10 N Grist, Glasgow.
September - 1st £30 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 G Riddle, Culzean; 3rd N Grist, Glasgow.

If you are an SOC member and over 18, you can always join the 200 Club. Join now for £6, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', and you will be entered for the monthly draws until 31May 2001, the end of our 'year'. Your cheque will be acknowledged with thanks. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176).**

Bean Geese

A new web site dedicated to Bean Geese in Scotland is now open, at http://www.bean-geese.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk Records of Bean Geese in Scotland would be appreciated so that an overall picture can be compiled. Any records from the Slamannan Plateau should be accompanied by a six-figure grid reference for inclusion in the annual reports.

SOC Annual Conference

A full report of the 2000 Annual Conference will appear in the next issue of *SBN*. However it is with great sadness that we have to report the tragic death of long standing SOC member *Bill Brackenridge*. Bill who attended the SOC conference on the Saturday was tragically killed on the A9 on his way home shortly after leaving many of his friends in the SOC. A full obituary will appear in the summer 2001 issue of *Scottish Birds*. We understand the RSPB and SWT are accepting donations which will be put towards a suitable commemorative project in Bill's memory.

On a happier note we can report that the annual SOC photographic competition was won this year by Eric McCabe with a superb photo of a Wren (page 8). Gordon Yates took 2nd prize with his photo of a Chough and 3rd prize went to Dennis Johnson with a photo of a Red-legged Partridge. These will appear in future issues of *SBN*.

Colour photographs to enhance our publications

We would like to thank a number of members who have very kindly sent in colour slides and photographs for use in SOC publications. We now have a slide scanner as well as a flatbed scanner, so if you have any good quality photos you think may be of use to us, we can scan them in and return the originals to you. Acknowledgements will as always appear with each photograph used.

We are also looking for a volunteer who has the time to come into 21 Regent Terrace and assist with scanning and cataloguing all our photographs. If you are interested please contact Sylvia on 0131 556 6042 to discuss this.

Wanted for *SBN*

'The Best of Days, The Worst of Days....'

Extracts from your notebooks/logs or journals which describe your best (or worst) days out in the field. Doesn't have to be about Scotland, but the more Scottish submissions we get, the better. Articles should aim to be about 1 page of *SBN*, about 1800 to 2000 words. Please send them to the Editor at **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT, email mail@the-soc.org.uk, fax 0131 558 9947.**

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Endowment Fund Grants

Summaries of reports from 1999 will be published in due course and members who attended the 2000 SOC Annual Conference will have heard from Steve Willis about the work being done by the Treshnish Auk Ringing Group. During 2001 a survey of all Mute Swans will be carried out (see page 10 of this issue). If you would like to apply for a grant for 2001 to assist with a particular study please ask for an application form from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.** All completed applications must be received by 31st January 2001.

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Recent Reports August - Mid November, a review of Autumn 2000.

In a fantastic autumn in Scotland the Outer Hebrides arguably produced the two star birds. An immature female **Hooded Merganser** was found on North Uist at Oban Trumisgarry on the 23 Oct and remained until the 1 Nov. With all previous British records now having been rejected due to the escape likelihood, after a recent review, this unringed, wary individual, which arrived in Scotland along with good numbers of other Nearctic wildfowl, becomes the potential first record for Britain. The bird of the autumn however was found on nearby South Uist in the form of a first winter **Long-tailed Shrike** at Howmore on the 3-4 Nov (possibly present since the 27 Oct). Being found and identified only two days after the last sighting of the Merganser, two fortunate cars – loads of English twitchers found themselves in the unique situation, on the 3, of managing to see one first for Britain whilst dipping on another. Indeed the Shrike was only the second ever record for Europe of the species after one in Sweden at Gotland on the 11 June 1999. The species is widespread throughout Asia with 9 recognised races and both these European birds appeared to be of the highly migratory western race *erythonotus*.

The Long-tailed was the star amongst an impressive list of rare shrikes with a first winter female **Brown Shrike** on Fair Isle on 21Oct (second for Britain after one on Shetland in 1985), an **Isabelline Shrike** on Foula on 3-6 Oct, 2 **Lesser Grey Shrikes** on Shetland in Sept and a **Steppe Grey Shrike** on South Ronaldsay on 22 Sept – third record for Orkney. In an impressive eastern rarity autumn once again highlights included 14 **Olive-backed Pipits** (all on Shetland), seven **Citrine Wagtails** all on the northern isles, a **Pied Wheatear** on Shetland on 17 Sept, a **Black-throated Thrush** on Foula on 23 Sept where two **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** were reported on 27-28 Sept, up to 7 **Lanceolated Warblers** on Shetland including the earliest ever autumn British record on the Out Skerries on 1 Sept and up to 5 different on Fair Isle in Sept, an **Olivaceous Warbler** at Collieston (Aberdeenshire) on 13-22 Sept (it was of the eastern race *elaeica* as were both previous Scottish records), 7 **Booted Warblers**, 6 **Pallas's Warblers**, a **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** in Fife at Denburn Wood on 7-8 Nov (fifth for Scotland), 4 **Radde's Warblers** and 3 **Dusky Warblers** were seen, a first winter male **Pine Grosbeak** was at Maywick (Shetland) on 9 Nov (second for

Long-tailed Shrike, South Uist. Nov 2000 *Andrew Stevenson*

Shetland and third for Scotland), at least 35 **Little Buntings** were seen from the 12 Sept in a fantastic showing mostly on Shetland and 5 **Yellow-breasted Buntings** were seen from the 27 Aug including the third for Fife and second for the Outer Hebrides. In Sept the first records for Moray and Nairn of **Wryneck** and **Icterine Warbler** were seen, whilst the first **Reed Warbler** for Renfrewshire was at Lochwinnoch RSPB on the 9 Sept, good numbers of **Grasshopper Warblers** were about on the northern isles with one on Fair Isle on the 23 Oct the latest ever there, and a **Long-tailed Tit** of the northern white-headed race *caudatus* was on Whalsay on 31 Oct – only the third record for Shetland and possibly only the second ever British record of *caudatus*. Nearctic passerines also showed up reasonably well with an early **Blackpoll Warbler** on Noss (Shetland) on the 14 Sept, a **Bobolink** on the Out Skerries on the 21-23 Sept (fourth for Scotland), a **Swainson's Thrush** at Brae on 12-13 Oct (third for Shetland), a **Grey-cheeked Thrush** reported on Papa Westray on 26 Oct (second Orkney record) and a **Red-eyed Vireo** at Stornoway on 21 Oct (second record for the Outer Hebrides). North

American wildfowl put in a very good showing with, as well as the Merganser, highlights including at least 17 **American Wigeons** seen including at least 10 together at Hillwell (Shetland) from the 9 Oct (the largest flock ever in Britain) and good numbers of **Green-winged Teals** again, including three drakes together near Inverness in Nov. Also in Nov a female **Steller's Eider** proved popular at Hopeman (Moray) on the 16-18, the discovery of a wing on Fetlar in 1996 aside, the first British record since the long staying male on the Outer Hebrides departed in 1984. North American waders showed up well also after last autumn's record showing with 2 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** reported in Sept on South Uist and at Aberlady Bay on the 24 (first record for Lothian), with in Sept and Oct the Outer Hebrides responsible for most of the four **American Golden Plovers**, at 7 **White-rumped Sandpipers**, 10 **Pectoral Sandpipers** and 8 **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** seen whilst a **Baird's Sandpiper** was on South Uist in Oct and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Ulva Lagoons (Argyll) on 9-11 Oct. Other wader highlights were the adult **Sharp-tailed Sandp**iper at Virkie/ Scatness (Shetland) on 27 Aug-1 Sept (fourth for Scotland), a **Marsh Sandpiper** at Dingwall on 4-5 Oct (first record for Highland) and 2 juvenile Pacific **Golden Plovers** – on Fair Isle on 28 Sept-12 Oct and Tiree on 12 Oct (first for Argyll).

Amongst seabirds a **Little Shearwater** was seen at Uisaed Point, Kintyre on the 7 Sept (second for Argyll) and good numbers of **Balearic Shearwaters** were seen, including in Sept the first and second records for Moray and Nairn and the first record for Fair Isle on the 7. Mirroring a record influx in England in Sept at least 25 **Honey Buzzards** were seen in Scotland from the 13. Gull highlights included an adult **Caspian Gull** on North Ronaldsay on the 14 Sept (there are currently no accepted Scottish records) and an adult **Bonaparte's Gull** at Lunan Bay on the 2 Oct (second record for Angus). A late juv **White-winged Black Tern** amazingly managed to survive on Orkney mainland at Newark Bay on the 18-20 Nov. The above are just some of the highlights of a memorable autumn.

Angus Murray

Lesser Yellowlegs *Bill Jackson*

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Scottish Bird News

Edited by
Martin Collinson
Assisted by
Ian Andrews, Helen Cameron and Sylvia Laing

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 64th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

passwords to access members' web pages
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Scottish Bird News

No 61 March 2001

SMITHSONIAN
APR 19 2001
LIBRARIES

'Avifaunas of Scotland' project

It is now over 100 years since Dr Harvie Brown launched his Vertebrate Faunas series. By 1935, there was a set of authoritative treatises covering most of Scotland - all of which have remained invaluable references. A number of modern texts - ranging from annotated checklists to professionally produced books - have been written since, but these have been produced on an ad hoc basis. Many of these have themselves become outdated or out of print and some areas still rely on rather old synopses. Some regions are planning to write up Atlas projects and others may be contemplating works such as this.

Proposal for a new 'Avifaunas' series

It is considered that sufficient knowledge now exists, in the form of breeding bird atlases, Local Recorders' databases, WeBS counts, numerous surveys etc., for a new project to be proposed - 'that the SOC undertakes to produce a series of authoritative, regional avifaunas covering the whole of Scotland, culminating in a new *'Birds of Scotland'*.

Key aspects to this project are that:

* the SOC is the lead player in the project (possibly under the auspices of the Editorial Committee)
* authoritative reference works are produced
* uniformity and consistency of style and content is maintained between areas/ volumes
* co-operation with other bodies holding data (e.g. BTO, RSPB, SNH etc.) ensures that the series is truly comprehensive.

Although the Harvie Brown Vertebrate Faunas were based on faunal regions, it is arguably only feasible now to use the current Recording Areas. There are 22 Recording Areas, each of which could conceivably warrant a separate Avifauna, but this does not preclude splitting or lumping of Recording Areas, should this be deemed advantageous. Smaller areas may be less daunting and more easily tackled. Boundaries have to be agreed.

The natural culmination of such a project would be a new *'Birds of Scotland'*, summarising information from the component volumes and putting it into a national perspective.

To publish a series such as this could be expensive. But, with modern technology (desktop publishing software etc.), this goal may be achievable. Without doubt, publication would be staggered over a considerable number of years. Another option to be evaluated is the possibility of publishing the project on the internet and/ or on CD. Advantages to publishing in this manner are that it is quicker, cheaper, more flexible and easily updated. Disadvantages are that there would be little income and some printed copies would inevitably be needed. Funding is a major issue.

For such a project, which replies heavily on volunteers and a large number of people agreeing to make considerable commitments, it is essential to judge support at the earliest opportunity. The proposal was accepted by Council in November 2000 and the Editorial Committee would now like to open up the consultation process. Any comments are welcome.

Ian Andrews
(ian@andrewsi.freeserve.co.uk) on behalf of the SOC Editorial Committee 19th October 2000

Some delegates at the SOC Annual Conference were lucky enough to have good views of a flock of wintering Twite. See conference report on page 8. A D Johnson

Standardised English Names

In November 2000, the SBRC agreed unanimously that the Scottish List will in future adopt the English names used by the BOURC in its British List. The change became official on 1st January 2001, and *SBN* now uses these standardised names. Every birder in Britain must by now have received one or more of the free 'Leica lists' handed out by the BOU, containing those standardised English names. The official Scottish List with the standardised names can be found on the SOC website. http://www.the-soc.org.uk

Membership Brochure

A copy of our new membership brochure is enclosed with this *SBN*. Don't throw it out! Please pass it on to someone and encourage them to join the SOC. If you think you can distribute more copies (at a local reserve, meeting, tourist office etc.), please contact Sylvia at HQ - there is no shortage of them!

Potential SPA for the Firth of Forth

With 200 km of coastline, 6,500 ha of mud flats, over 95,000 wintering waterfowl and 200,000 pairs of breeding seabirds, the Firth of Forth is one of the most important wildlife areas in Britain.

Northern Fulmars arguing *A D Johnson*

The Firth of Forth is the second most important estuarine and coastal area in Scotland in terms of numbers of wintering birds.

To protect the habitats for the thousands of wintering birds the Scottish Executive has asked SNH to consult interested parties on the designation of a Special Protection Area (SPA) covering approximately 95% of the intertidal area. SPAs were introduced by the 1979 EC Wild Birds Directive and the objectives of this document were modified with the publication of the Habitats and Species Directive in 1992. The latter directive called for the setting up of a Europe-wide network of the most vital areas of conservation concern. This network, called Natura 2000, comprises SPAs, which are all bird sites, and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), which protect plants and animals.

In most cases SPAs are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), areas protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Before the current consultation the Firth of Forth had 20 separate SSSIs; now 17 of these will be amalgamated into one large site that includes the various sections of the SPA which were not previously SSSI. One other site, Fife Ness Coast, also underpins the SPA while 2 others, Barnsmuir Coast and St Margaret's Marsh, are unaffected by these changes and are not part of the SPA.

While legal protection afforded by the SPA will only cover the wintering bird interest on the Firth of Forth and the habitats such as saltmarsh and mudflat that support them, the SSSI covers a wide range of habitats and species: sand-dunes, coastal grasslands, rare plants and rare beetles plus many others. The thousands of breeding seabirds are protected by the separate Forth Islands SPA covering the Bass Rock, Craigleith and the Isle of May among others. The SSSI also gives protection to the many interesting geological features that occur around the Firth of Forth, especially on the rocky East Lothian and Fife coasts.

European sites benefit from greater protection against development than ordinary SSSIs. The regulations allow for greater scrutiny by the competent authorities of development proposals (both on and outwith the SPA) that might significantly damage the bird interest. In most cases only developments of national importance or of overriding public benefit will be allowed to cause significant damage.

While this outline may sound ominous to developers and industry, it should not be felt that this designation is a hindrance to business, but instead it should be considered an accolade that an internationally important bird site can co-exist with major industry. With the protection given by the SPA designation, wise management and good relations between interested parties, the Firth of Forth can continue to provide a home for a wide variety of species as well as continuing to be the centre of one of the most important industrial areas in Britain.

Global warming

Global warming is now established and there is a chance that estuaries with large mudflats, such as the RSPB's Skinflats nature reserve in the inner Firth of Forth, may become permanently submerged or eroded by the increased wave action from rising sea levels. The RSPB states that the problem is twofold: first to stop global warming by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and second to replace the threatened mudflats with new coastal wetlands. To investigate the possibilities of replacing mudflats they have joined a group of organisations to commission a study to look at a site adjacent to Skinflats and see if new mudflats and a saltmarsh could be created. Watch this space for further developments.

Acid rain affects Britain's Birds

New research published in *BTO News* (the newsletter of the British Trust for Ornithology), has been able to link changes in the distribution of some of our breeding birds with deposition of sulphur – mostly in acid rain. These changes may lead to monitoring of bird distribution as an important means of keeping tabs on these effects. The UK Government has spent a great deal of money trying to minimise outputs which result in acid rain, and has promoted the use of ultra low sulphur fuels for cars.

The research by Dan Chamberlain and Humphrey Crick of the BTO, and Rachel Warren of Imperial College London, took the results from the 2 BTO Breeding Bird Atlases to find out whether the changes in the distribution of birds between 1968-72 and 1988-91 were linked to acid deposition. High levels of sulphur deposition seem to be generally bad for Common Redshank and White-throated Dipper. Furthermore, these 2 species, together with Northern Lapwing, Common Redstart and Ring Ouzel, were less likely to have become extinct in local areas if the amount of sulphur being deposited had declined. Another 2 species were more likely to have colonised squares where this had happened, Little Plover and Lesser Whitethroat.

White-throated Dipper *A D Johnson*

Dumfries and Galloway Black Grouse Recovery Project

The Dumfries and Galloway Black Grouse Recovery Project has been extended by at least a year. Detailed habitat management plans have now been drawn up for over half the leks in the region and, as a result, a wide range of habitat improvements have been carried out. Much of the actual groundwork has been performed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust's Environmental Task Team based in Castle Douglas, under the leadership of John Hall.

Within both state-owned and private forests, unnecessary fencing has been dismantled, deer fencing has been marked, targeted areas of conifers have been felled or thinned, and hundreds of Birches, Rowans and Willows have been planted where there were few present before. The slump in the forestry industry over recent years has reduced the amount of money available for conservation and, to some extent, has held back implementation of the works proposed in the earlier plans. Despite this, a fair amount has already been achieved, and it is likely that 2001 will see an expansion in Black Grouse work. Some habitat work has also been carried out on private farmland, including fence removal, moorland management and tree planting, but it has so far proved very difficult to obtain funding to help with proposed reductions in sheep numbers. Most farmers who have Black Grouse on their land are already in the ESA scheme; nearly all of those have already reached the scheme's funding limit, with no further funds available to reduce sheep numbers.

In this region much emphasis has been placed on raising the public's awareness of the plight of the species, through meetings, talks, newspaper items and seminars. These have proved very successful. The project has received many offers to help with ground-work. A study-group has been established to monitor leks on private ground. Forest Enterprise staff have been checking their leks. Recently, the local RSPB members group decided to 'adopt a lek', and have been out in the field this winter, thinning out young conifers, planting birches, marking fences and helping with heather management in a lek area that encompasses a young plantation and private farmland. This exciting development should surely be repeated around the country.

The bird's increasing popularity is certainly in its favour, but many people are surprised to learn that the species is not fully protected. There is little or no shooting in this region, but in some other parts of Scotland they are still shot, with apparently few records being kept. There is still much to learn about the species, with more questions being raised than being answered; to continue to shoot them at this stage is perhaps short-sighted. There is an urgent need for an overall country-wide strategy to save the species, preferably with government funding.

John Adair, Dumfries and Galloway Black Grouse Project Officer

(This article taken from the Scottish Black Grouse Newsletter, RSPB)

Erika

On 12 December 1999 the Erika broke in half off the French Atlantic coast. The effects were catastrophic, particularly for the seabirds. A special issue of *L'Oiseau*, the magazine of the French bird protection society LPO, published at the end of last year, looks back on the disaster.

Over 63,500 birds were collected, live or dead, of which 2,150 (about 10% of those rescued alive) were returned to the sea. It is estimated that up to 200,000 more birds died at sea and were not discovered. Of the 41,000 which were identified, over 75% were Common Guillemots. The next 3 commonest species, and the only others with over 1,000 found, were Black Scoter, Razorbill and Northern Gannet. The complete list includes some unexpected species, such as one Eurasian Collared Dove.

Eurasian Collared Dove. It would appear that not only seabirds are affected by oil spills.
A D Johnson

The LPO took responsibility for co-ordinating these efforts. Its membership is in no way comparable to that of (say) the RSPB, and what was achieved is most praiseworthy. The magazine asks what is being done to prevent similar events in the future, and includes a table of those in the past, back to the *Torrey Canyon* in 1967. At the time I write we are faced with yet another, *Jessica*, in the Galapagos Islands. It is not a cheering prospect.

John G Davies

White-tailed Eagle fledglings reach 100 landmark

When the last White-tailed Eagle was killed over Shetland more than 80 years ago, ornithologists feared that this noble creature would never grace the northern skies again. However, a quarter of a century ago, the then Nature Conservancy Council set up a reintroduction scheme of the White-tailed Eagle to Scotland from Norway. There are now 19 pairs in Scotland and this year saw the number of chicks fledged since the start of the scheme reach 100. This year saw an improvement with eight pairs successfully raising 12 young compared to 6 pairs raising 11 young last year. However, the birds still have a long way to go before they reach the threshold of 50 pairs considered to be a secure population.

One of the 'founding mothers' of Scotland's recovering White-tailed Eagle population, Blondie, disappeared in May last year and her body was found later. Analysis proved that she died from natural causes. Blondie, with her light, sandy head plumage, was at least 21 years old and had raised 15 chicks in as many years. She had the prestige of being mother to the first White-tailed Eagle chick for more than 70 years to fly from a Scottish nest, in Mull, in 1985.

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Bird-killing in Cyprus

The year 2000 was probably the worst year ever for Cyprus's birds. Melis Charalambides, of the Cyprus Ornithological Society, estimated that c20 million were shot or trapped on the island. Most of these birds (12-15 million) were fully protected species and were killed using efficient and sophisticated illegal methods by organised teams of criminals for the local and international delicacy market (estimated to be worth c£20 million). The mistaken view that trapping is a small-scale "traditional" subsistence Cypriot pastime was laid to rest in 2000 when the lucrative trade was finally investigated and highlighted to the wider world.

The illegal trapping was widely reported in most British daily newspapers after a number of incidents involving birdwatchers came to a head during the peak migration season in September. Two British birders had a terrible holiday in Eastern Cyprus at the end of September. Dr Peter Cosgrove and his father Robin witnessed the killing at first hand when they visited the migrant hot spot at Cape Greco National Park. On the morning of 28 September there was a fall of c20,000 birds, predominantly (protected) Spotted Flycatchers and Red-backed Shrikes. Within 24 hours, >95% of these birds were dead or dying on limesticks or in mist-nets. One of the trappers threatened to shoot the birdwatchers for taking photographs of the bird-killing. When the birdwatchers retreated to their hotel, the police arrived and questioned them for alleged spying. Later it emerged that this was common practice, with the trappers regularly reporting anyone photographing the illegal killing to the police as spies. The police confiscate the films and the tourists are usually too intimidated to take the matter further.

In an attempt to avoid trouble, the Cosgroves left Cape Greco and went inland and further along the coast. During the remainder of their holiday, they visited 85 different woodland and scrub sites and found limesticks, mist-nets and traps in every site visited. The trapping was so blatant that mist-nets were even tied to public fences and road signs! Competition for these migrant bushes was so intense that none were left vacant or available and there was evidence of huge scale acacia plantings and watering, just to create new sites along the coast for killing migrants. To provide an idea of the scale of the trade, the following figures were provided by authorities at the British Sovereign Base (BSB) at Dhekelia. In 1999, 367 mist nets were seized, together with a large quantity of other poaching equipment and 14 poachers were arrested. Up to September 2000, 123 more nets were seized, 13 poachers were arrested and many more were reported on summons, all this from one relatively small area.

The Cosgroves' experiences were not isolated. Part of the new bird hide at Larnaca was blown up by a bomb in the summer and a British birder living in Cyprus was attacked and beaten up when he intervened to stop trappers killing a number of fully protected birds on the Dhekelia BSB area near Cape Pyla. Later in October, the same birder was threatened with an iron bar near Akhna Dam, also on the BSB area.

This lucrative trade has developed dramatically in the last 3 years due to a combination of factors. The illegal bird trade has been swamped with cheap, good quality mist-nets. 12 ft high, 40 ft long mist-nets, imported from Italy and Japan, cost between £5-8 each, or the equivalent gained from selling half a dozen Common Nightingales. Limesticks, although also illegal, are mass-produced at a factory in Cyprus. The efficiency of these "tools" has recently been increased beyond recognition by the use of cheap CD and tape-players placed under the nets and limesticks in the spring and autumn. The CDs and tape-players each play different bird calls. Thus, for example, a single trapper can concentrate effort by using one net to target shrikes, one for *Sylvia* warblers, one for Eurasian Wrynecks and one for buntings, with most trappers catching up to 100 birds in a morning.

Spotted Flycatcher dying on a limestick, Cyprus. *Pete Cosgrove*

In October, the *Daily Mail* paid for an RSPB undercover investigations officer to travel to Cyprus and witness the killing for themselves. The trip was given a special 2 page gruesome colour write-up on 3 November in the *Daily Mail* and extensive coverage on the RSPB's web-site. During their visit, the RSPB estimated that up to 5 miles of mist nets covered the Cape Greco area alone. Perhaps more significantly, the Cypriot press ran the story over successive weekends in October with the *Sunday Mail* dedicating the centre pages of its weekend colour supplement to 3 stories: (1)"A massacre of millions", (2) "The killing fields of Cape Greco" and (3) "Cyprus simply cannot carry on killing everybody else's birds".

Following the *Sunday Mail's* article, the local Green Party issued a plea for the public to inform both them and police about any cases of illegal trapping they come across. Around the same time, the Cyprus Conservation Foundation, an NGO working in Cyprus on conservation issues, took up the issue in the Greek (as well as English) press. As a result of all the adverse publicity, a crackdown on netting and liming by the Republic of Cyprus and Sovereign Base Police forces in the Larnaca and Famagusta area was reported on Cypriot television news at the beginning of November.

One of the most interesting developments was reported in November in the *Cyprus Mail*. The powerful Cyprus Hunting Association backed the RSPB's call for Cyprus's entry to the EU to be blocked by urging Brussels to make a clampdown on limesticking and mist-netting a precondition for Cyprus accession. The Association was keen to improve its image by adopting a more conservation friendly approach. This also triggered a large rally in Paralimni, where large numbers of local people who wanted 'traditional' liming to be allowed to continue, demanded that the ban on mist-nets and tape-lures be enforced properly!

Most conservationists appear to agree that a tourist boycott would be counter-productive, removing the economic incentive of green tourism revenue, and instead urged letters to be written to the President of Cyprus, the Department of Tourism and the Cypriot ambassador in London. Many of the species targeted have seen massive declines throughout Europe and considerable efforts are now being made across the EU to halt these declines. These conservation measures are only likely to succeed if significant numbers of birds return to their breeding areas in successive seasons. The non-compliance of the EU Birds Directive will probably cause Cyprus significant problems when it comes to negotiating accession. Clearly it is unacceptable in the 21st century to flout international laws, render conservation programmes across Europe ineffective, and expect no response from other countries. Therefore, international pressure supported throughout the EU might yield significant positive results. It seems likely that this story will run and run and it will be interesting to see what happens during the forthcoming spring migration season.

For more information visit the RSPB's website on ***www.rspb.org.uk***

The Great Ayrshire Bird Race 2001

To fight off the excesses of New Year, the Ayrshire Branch of the SOC decided to have a bird race. This was organised and hosted by the social convenors of the branch's "youth" division, Dave and Julie Grant. Given the recent alcoholic damage done to brain cells, the rules were simple:

We would start at 9 am and finish at 4.30 pm from Chez Grant in Coylton. Teams must have at least 3 members who must all see the species for it to count. No straying outside Ayrshire, and none of that "I heard it" nonsense.

Three teams took part, who were named (for the purposes of this report) as follows:

Ringers: Jim "Vice Chair" Thompson, Tony "Logistics" Scott, Davy "Mist Net" Gray.
Amateurs: Angus "Red Wine" Hogg, Andrew "SNH" Stevenson, Dick "White Wine" Vernon
Juniors: Dave and Julie Grant, Kevin Waite.

The weather was mild but overcast with rain forecast for later in the day; high tide was at 8 am. The itineraries of the 3 teams were a closely guarded secret. The Ringers and Amateurs had done some un-sportsmanlike bird searching the day before, while the Juniors concentrated on "planning" in *The Keys* public house.

The Amateurs sped away with the screech of wheel-spin as the clock chimed 9 am, with the others taking a more laid-back style. Post-race analysis showed an interesting difference in strategies. The Amateurs considered the state of the tide, prevailing wind and accessibility of off-licences before deciding to head for Martnaham Loch, then Ayr and north to Fairlie. (Suspicion has it that once a species was ticked, car horns and shotguns were used to spoil things for following teams: the evidence being the strangely absent 8 Bohemian Waxwings just 10 minutes after they sped through Ayr!)

The winning team - The Amateurs - Dick Vernon, Andrew Stevenson and Angus Hogg

The Ringers took a more southerly tack with a greater inland emphasis. Was this too risky? Only the final counts would tell. The Juniors based their approach on a careful geo-ornithological analysis. Unlike the Amateurs, we were after Quality and not mere Quantity. We too headed north but picked our target sites with care. We were rewarded by a low-level pass by a White Stork over Irvine. Despite the competition, our public duty required us to phone *Birdline* and the other team with a phone. Suggestions that this was only to gloat are beneath contempt! With the light fading and the rain falling, the race was soon over. As expected, the Amateurs were playing down missing out on the White Stork with comments like "Of course, it must be an escape!" and "Surely you're not going to count that?" – methinks they protest too much.

The Ringers - Jim Thompson, Tony Scott and Davy Gray

The Juniors - Dave Grant, Julie Grant and Kevin Waite

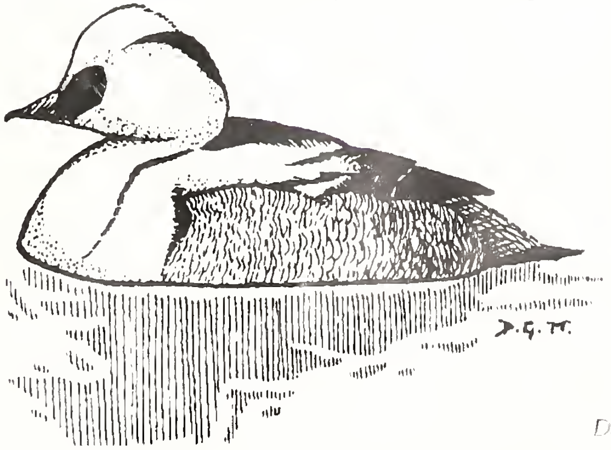
The Grants laid on a wonderful afternoon tea and it was down to the business of comparing lists. This was conducted in a serious and friendly manner as befits an SOC meeting, although *Ciconia ciconia* did seem to touch some raw nerves. It was a closely fought match: the Ringers gaining ground on inland species only to lose it to the Amateurs and Juniors on the coast. The final scores were as follows: Amateurs = 91 (84 miles), Juniors = 78 (88 miles) and Ringers = 68 (49 miles). A prize bottle of wine was presented in a most gracious fashion by the organiser Dave Grant to the Amateurs.

Bohemian Waxwing *Dave Grant*

The total cumulative number of species seen was 98, which given the weather and time of year is a very creditable tally for Ayrshire. Highlights included Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Bohemian Waxwing, Common Greenshank, Brent Goose, Iceland Gull, Goosander, Whooper Swan, Smew, and Red-throated Diver. Oh, there was also that White Stork!

Everyone thought the whole event a great success and it is already set as an annual event. Many other birders have expressed interest in joining the race, and so next year could be even better. Our thanks go to Dave and Julie Grant for organising and hosting the event. Details of the routes, the species seen, can be seen on the Ayrshire Branch website: this can be reached from the Branches section of the SOC website. http://www.the-soc.org.uk

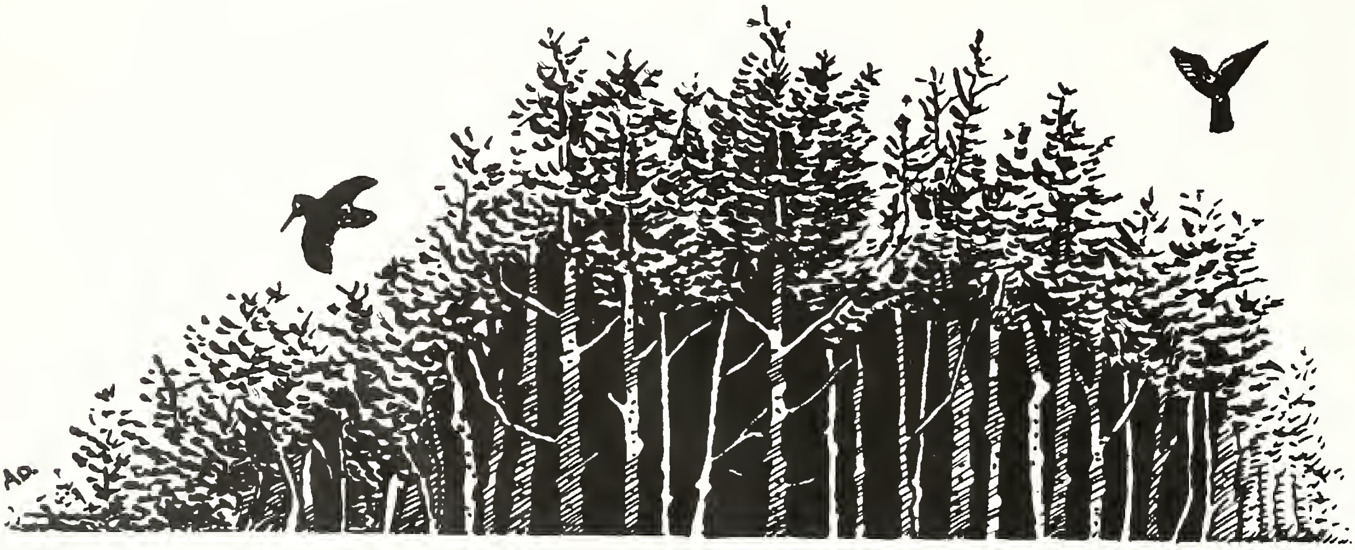
Kevin Waite



Smew *David Mitchell*

SOC Fife Branch Trip to Northumberland, 9-11 June 2000

It is pleasant to report on a trip that was both enjoyable and included several noteworthy sightings. On our way south a couple of us stopped off at Hulne Park, a mature woodland on the slopes of the River Aln. A previous SOC trip to this woodland gave us an idea of where would be good places to birdwatch. We were soon rewarded with Spotted Flycatchers and nesting Great Tits. A Wood Nuthatch appeared briefly. While we waited patiently for it to reappear a Eurasian Sparrowhawk flashed through the trees and a Hawfinch obligingly sat out in the open on an adjacent tree, giving everyone excellent views of this species which has the reputation of being very elusive. Following an agreeable walk through the woods looking at the commoner woodland species, we drove on to Sunderland, settled into our respective guest houses and met up with other members of the party.

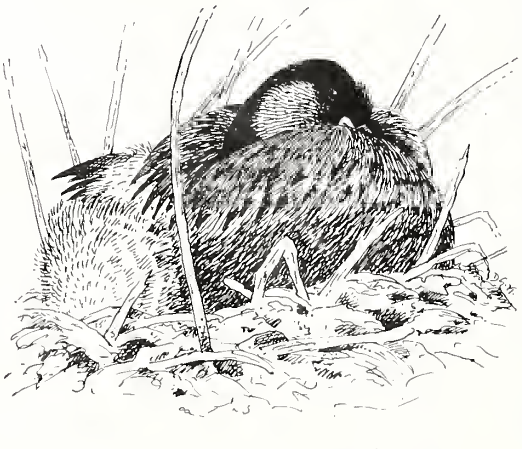


Eurasian Woodcock and European Nightjar *Andrew Dowell*

Next day we gathered together at 9 am, but Brian had already done an early morning reconnaissance, coming across some Yellow Wagtails in a disused railway cutting and some bird calls which he was fairly sure were Lesser Whitethroats. These findings were worthy of further investigation but first we visited Low Newton Pools, about 4 miles south of Seahouses, where we saw a variety of ducks, gulls and terns. Impressive numbers of both Arctic and Little Terns were breeding there, as explained by the enthusiastic warden and his assistants. A stop was then made at Brian's cutting, where Common Whitethroats, Common Linnets and European Greenfinches were easily seen. Donald confirmed the distinctive calls we heard as being those of the Lesser Whitethroat, but the 2 birds were only seen fleetingly, hidden in the dense foliage.

After lunch was one of the highlights, for me, of the weekend; a trip out to the Farne Islands. Various gulls, Great Cormorants, Common Guillemots, Seals and Cuddy Ducks (local name for Common Eiders, Cuddy being a corruption of Cuthbert, the local saint) were plentiful as we made a tour of the islands. On landing on one of the islands we were greeted by representatives of the National Trust who relieved us of £4 each for the privilege of landing. The other island inhabitants, however, were not so welcoming and they did their best to repel us from their shores. Crack flying squadrons of Arctic Terns were mobilised and several direct hits were made against us, as my sore head testified. Hundreds of Atlantic Puffins, Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns were easy to see and photograph, but we also saw a few Roseate Terns thanks to some information by one of the Wardens.

After returning to the mainland we indulged in a spot of twitching and went off to find a Rosy Starling, which had been reported frequenting a garden on a housing estate in Bedlington. As soon as we had parked in a a side-street near the garden, the bird flew out to met us and landed on a garage roof just opposite. If only all birds could be so obliging! Even that was not the end of the day's viewing because, after our evening meal in an Alnwick pub, we made a dusk trip to Holburn Moss where we were rewarded with views of both Eurasian Woodcock and European Nightjars.



Little Grebe *David Mitchell*

The following morning, after revisiting to the railway cutting for further views of Lesser Whitethroats, our main destination was the Northumberland Wildlife Trust site at Hauxley, near Amble. Again we saw the 4 species of tern, plus Gadwall, Common Pochard, Ruddy Duck, Reed Bunting, Sedge Warbler, Grey Partridges and 2 Yellow Wagtails. A few miles south of Hauxley is another Trust reserve, Cresswell Pools, which housed a variety of wildfowl, gulls and terns. Among the many European Wigeon was one American Wigeon with its distinctive head markings, which showed clearly whenever one could get the telescope to stay steady in the strong wind. Our final destination before the trip back to Scotland was over to Holy Island. Not many waders were seen on the mudflats but on the island Lough, a reed fringed freshwater lake, were some Ruddy Ducks, Black-necked and Little Grebes and Bar-tailed Godwits. The route back to the cars took us along the Straight Lonnen, a track noted for attracting unusual migrants, but on this occasion none were found.

So that concluded another very successful and enjoyable SOC trip. A wide variety of birds were seen and most people saw at least one new species.

Many thanks are due to Allister for organising the itinerary.

Mike Walton

This article is taken from the Fife Branch Newsletter

Sounds of Speyside on the Kenyan coast

The tide was out, stranding thousands of tiddlers in the rock pools - black and yellow stripey ones, iridescent blue spotty ones, pinky-grey smudgey-blotched camouflaged ones - all potential breakfast snacks for the patrolling Pied Kingfishers and Little Egrets. But for once I was ignoring the birds, distracted by the novelty of the fishes, slowly grazing sea hares, fierce red and green crabs and delicate jade-green coral. Until I heard a memory-jogging sound... a regular, high-pitched peeping call, and, looking seawards, found an Osprey in display flight. He was flying parallel with the shore, over the shallow, sparkling waters of the reef, carrying a fish in his talons. He climbed high, then dropped seawards, climbed again, dropped again, all the while calling to another bird which flew out from the palm trees and joined him.

I wasn't surprised to see an Osprey, after all, it was late October and Ospreys commonly winter on the east coast of Africa. But why was this bird displaying? Ospreys aren't known to breed south of the Gulf of Aden. And they don't winter with their mates. I knew that, because in the early seventies I spent many weeks as a voluntary warden at the Loch Garten Osprey camp. Sometimes I was there in early April when the male first arrived, and it would be several days before a female turned up to join him. They certainly weren't paired on arrival. So in Kenya I was probably watching sub-adult birds engaging in some premature courtship behaviour, to be practised in earnest in future summers, some ten thousand miles or so further north.

I stood basking in the equatorial sunshine, listening to the urgent, familiar call, remembering Scots Pine forest, the forward hide, Crested Tits, cold tents, Mary Marsh's home-cooking, washing up marathons....

But I wasn't here at Watamu as an RSPB volunteer, I was here as A Rocha's International Administrator, helping Colin Jackson, an ornithologist working with A Rocha Kenya, to lead a members' week. And I wasn't staying at a snowy camp site, with baths at the Nethybridge Hotel on offer once a week. We were based at Turtle Bay Beach Club, living in luxury, with unlimited hot baths and showers and food and drink available round the clock.

We'd come to learn about the A Rocha Kenya project. So we joined Colin when he was ringing in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, a 20 x 20 km remnant of coastal forest which once stretched for hundreds of miles along the coast. We saw in the hand two of the Globally Endangered species found here: Spotted Ground Thrush and East Coast Akalat. But hardly any ringing studies are being done in Kenya at the moment - the Nairobi Ringing Group (started by Colin) operates regularly, but here on the coast only Colin is ringing now. A Rocha plans to establish a field study centre here, facilitating research, training and environmental education. There are keen naturalists acting as forest guides, superbly skilled at identifying and mimicking the bird calls, eager to be trained in research and monitoring techniques. So much urgently needs to be learnt. We encountered big flocks of the endemic Clarke's Weaver in the forest - but their breeding sites have yet to be located. We saw the tiny Sokoke Scops Owl, its survival threatened by illegal logging and clearance for farmland - but nobody has ever found its nest.

We saw many exotic birds: scimitarbills, trogons, helmet-shrikes, sunbirds, bulbuls and weavers. But it was the familiar birds which excited me most. Not just the Ospreys, but the waders at Mida Creek and Sabaki River Mouth. Lying back in the shade of a mangrove tree, I watched Common Greenshanks probing in warm mud, with a pink shimmer behind them (well you can't focus on Greater Flamingo and Common Greenshank at the same time, they wade at different depths!). Grey Plover, Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpipers flock together with the more exotic Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Terek Sandpipers and hundreds of Little Stints.

Eurasian Curlew look different here - paler, and longer-billed, but it's hard to study Curlews when there are Crab Plovers about. These are stonking black and white waders with long, sturdy bills designed for crushing crabs. They have strange, unwaderish habits, nesting down burrows in colonies, like rabbits. They don't breed here on the Kenyan coast, where temperature are only about 30 C, but in Somalia, where the only place to stay cool is underground. No food for the chicks down a tunnel, so they can't feed themselves, as wader chicks normally do, but wait for their parents to bring food back to them.

For a glorious blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the Kenyan coast is hard to beat. If you'd like to know more about A Rocha Kenya or Turtle Bay Beach Club contact A Rocha, Connansknowe, Kirkton, Dumfries, DG1 1SX, Phone/Fax 01387 710286, E-mail a_rocha@compuserve.com or look at www.arocha.org.

Barbara Mearns

Charles Frank

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SOC Annual Conference 2000

After the usual congenial reunions around the bar on the Friday evening, delegates went through to the main room to be staggered by a succession of wonderful images presented by Dennis Coutts, the Honorary President of the Shetland Bird Club. Through the years we have become used to seeing Dennis' pictures in *Birding World*, *Birding Scotland* and most especially the British Birds Rarities Committee Annual Report, but the impact of them en masse was quite staggering, considering most of us would be quite grateful just to see the birds involved, never mind taking brilliant and crisp photos of them. The succession of mouthwatering America and Siberian rarities was enlivened by Dennis' anecdotes, including that of the wedding where the official photographer's mind wasn't wholly on taking pictures of the happy couple, but rather the White-throated Needletail that was bombing round the church at the time.

The Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore.

This would normally be a hard act to follow but fortunately the standards of the images presented to the audience afterwards when showing the results of the SOC Photographic Competition were excellent.

Klaus Malling Olsen

The main part of the Conference started on Saturday morning with Klaus Malling Olsen, a member of the Danish Rarities Committee. Gull taxonomy, especially the Herring Gull complex, has recently been in a constant state of flux as different populations have been considered as having specific status.

Most birders are rather bemused by the features that we are expected to look for in trying to identify the different races/species of Herring Gulls. Klaus concentrated his efforts on looking at the features of just one form, the 'Caspian Gull' *Larus argentatus cachinnans*, one of the populations that we might well expect to see in Scotland. Using an exceptional series of photos he took us through the main characteristics that should be looked out for in each of the main age plumages of the form. This is a leggy, elegant gull with a small, angular head and long sloping forehead and a flat crown, a long neck and a long slender weak-looking bill. While these features looked self-evident in the photos I rather suspect that it wouldn't be quite as easy when confronted with a flock of 2,000 Herring Gulls at Dunbar harbour in the autumn. He finished his talk with some discussion of Kumlien's and Slender-billed Gulls, other forms on many birders wish-lists.

Norman Elkins, from Fife Branch, a familiar face at many SOC conferences, then spoke to us in his professional capacity as a meteorologist. We are all fans of the weather forecast. I suspect that birders form what must be the most enthusiastic part of the weather forecast audience, most especially in the spring and the autumn. The shipping forecast cannot be listened to much more avidly than by a carload of birders, just before dawn on an autumn morning with easterlies!

Our fascination with rarities is fuelled by the unexpected gifts of the weather systems and Norman told us just which aspects of the climate that we should thank for the bounty of that cracking *Dendroica* warbler or that lovely Siberian wader. Norman then went on to talk about the changing climate, something of topical concern in view of the difficulties experienced by our southern brethren (including 2 of the speakers at the conference) with the recent flooding. It was refreshing to hear from an expert that Global Warming (note the caps!) was a term much misused by the media and that the court was still out on the extent to which the recent warming trend was part of the natural variation in climate over long periods of time or whether it was wholly man-made due to atmospheric CO_2 pollution. Just as Klaus had done, Norman presented what might have been a very technical talk in a manner that was clear, concise and wholly comprehensible to lay persons.

Norman Elkins

After the morning coffee break we returned to hear from Chris Wernham from the British Trust for Ornithology about the soon-to-be published BTO Migration Atlas. Compiled from the huge database available to the BTO after many decades of ringing returns, the Migration Atlas will draw together not only the ringing data, but the expertise of acknowledged experts for each of the species examined, with what appears to be pretty good graphical design and computer graphics from Poysers, the publishers. Page mock-ups were shown, each one well laid out and accompanied by some eye-catching vignettes from known artists. The BTO have recently made considerable efforts to establish a presence in Scotland rather than treating us as a distant northern outpost of the UK where there are lots of good birds.

Chris Wernham

The appointment of Alan Lauder to Head of the BTO in Scotland is to be welcomed and part of this process could be seen when Chris took us through some of the species accounts that were of particular interest to Scotland and indeed how Scotland's contribution to the ringing scheme as a whole was of great importance (we pulled more than our weight). The European Storm-petrel pages were particularly interesting. Chris did express a hankering to become part of the expanded BTO presence in Scotland. I'm sure talks like this will make her more than welcome.

Another familiar face at these conferences over the years Ken Shaw, of the RSPB by occupation and the *British Birds* Rarities Committee for his sins, then spoke to us about migrants from the perspective of a county birder. Having been intimately involved in birding in both North-east

Scotland and Fife, where he now lives, Ken related lots of stories about his favourite migrants. Some involved perhaps his favourite garden bird from his days on the North-east coast, a Booted Warbler, while others reflected his current enthusiasm in Fife, the Mediterranean Gull, which is now appearing in increasing numbers in Scotland. Ken's enthusiasm for his subject spoke volumes about what he got out of birding, not just in pursuit of migrants but also in terms of friends and acquaintances.

Ken Shaw

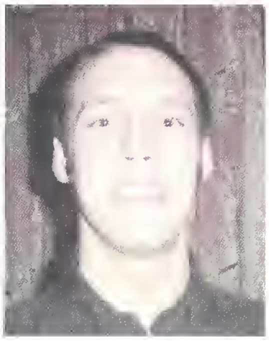
He went on to talk about the importance of birders putting something back into birding through working a patch and then contributing to their local bird report, and through that the national report. Everyone's contribution, however small, was helpful in building up the big picture of what was going on at county and national level.

Lunch followed. For the rest of us, keen on getting a Speyside goodie, it was out into the field, grabbing a bowl of soup at the local cafe en route. The best value appeared to be for those that headed southwest in the Laggan area, where up to 5 Golden Eagles were seen in the air at once.

Left to right: Mark Holling (partly hidden), Alan Lauder, Norman Elkins, Chris Wernham, Martin Collinson & Paul Speak viewing Twite from the side of the A9 just north of Newtonmore.

Those that headed into the forested area around Insh and Glen Feshie, in search of Crested Tit, WesternCapercaillie and Crossbill had less spectacular results, although we were grateful that Klaus bagged a crossbill that he was convinced sounded different from the Common and Parrot Crossbill he knows from Denmark.

After tea and cakes we settled down to listen to Ian Burfield talking about this PhD work on Ring Ouzel. With the recent decline in Ring Ouzel numbers it is a bird that is starting to slip from amber to red conservation status. The problem is that there is a lack of knowledge as to why it is failing. To elucidate this decline Ian investigated the recent puzzling variation in success between the birds of the Angus Glens, where they thrive, while the Moorfoots Hills population seems to be in decline. His investigation into the habitat parameters of the large number of territories that he worked on (with the help of local SOC members and using work done by SOC local surveys conducted in the 1980s and 1990s) suggested that there were few real physical differences between the 2 areas to account for the differences in success other than land management. The Moorfoots are badly overgrazed when compared to the Angus Glens. He made a number of suggestions, such as excluding or reducing grazing within some habitats to see if birds might return to sites where they formerly bred.



Ian Burfield

Ian Wallace, followed with a typically idiosyncratic talk about Common Rosefinches. In a refreshing contrast to the high-tech and highly colourful "Power Point" slides that are becoming the standard at conferences, Ian gave us a lower tech but highly artistic presentation that combined his hand-written tables with some of his fantastic paintings and sketches that we are all familiar with. He told us of the expansion of Common Rosefinch through Europe from the Central and Eastern Palearctic heartland and the intermittent attempts to colonise the British Isles. He discussed the reasons for the current impasse, suggesting that Common Rosefinches prefer to breed in loose aggregations. The combined singing of several males is necessary spur to successful breeding and colonisation - the Viagra of Rosefinches!

Ian Wallace

The AGM followed with the SOC President, Brian Downing, fielding a number of questions from the floor about the proposed shift from Regent Terrace. However, due to difficulties with the planning authorities, progress getting suitable accommodation in the Dunblane/Bridge of Allan area had been held up and there was no definite outcome yet in sight.

The annual dinner followed. I must remark that Conference Dinners have improved both in terms of the quality of the food and more immensely with the removal of the after-dinner speech. Things are much more relaxed, probably even more so for those that sit through the dinner at the top table with sweaty palms and no appetite! The ceilidh followed for those of that bent, the bar for those that prefered their exercise in the form of weight-lifting with one arm.

Klaus being introduced to the delights of a celeidh by SOC Secretarial Assistant, Helen Cameron.

In the morning after, the "waking-the-dead" slot fell to Martin Collinson of the *British Birds* Editorial Board and the BOU Taxonomic Sub-committee who provided a "Rough Guide to Taxonomy" in order to explain the why and wherefores of splitting and lumping. With the aid of some marvellous graphics and the choice of some good examples he showed how speciation is not a cut and dried event but rather a continuum of events within the speciation process where it is difficult, if not impossible in some situations, to say whether speciation has occurred or if the populations involved are still the same species. Martin made it abundantly clear which side of the line he fell when it came to the contentious attitudes of some in Britain in adopting the PSC (phylogenetic species concept). Despite the fact that the current paradigm, the BSC

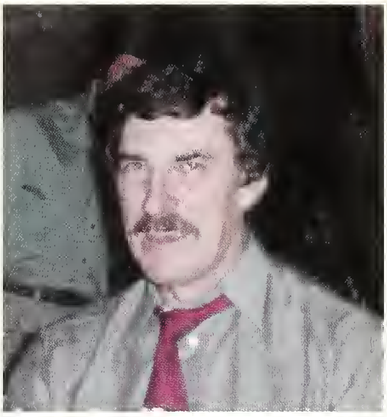
Martin Collinson

(biological species concept), was over 50 years old it was still by far the most useful tool for studying the speciation of birds. The main difficulty was the fact that the BSC recognised just 2 levels of speciation, the subspecies and species, in what was a continuum of variation.

From a talk about the boundaries of species and subspecies followed a talk by Ron Summers on the speciation of crossbills in Scotland. This was cutting-edge fieldwork into one of the most interesting developments in taxonomy in recent years. Since *Loxia scotica* was elevated to the rank of a full species, research has been going on to investigate the ecology and status of the Scottish Crossbill. It came as a great suprise to many people when scrutiny of birds in the field revealed not just 2 populations of crossbills in Scotland, the Common and Scottish Crossbill, but the fact that there were even larger-billed birds that fit the description of Parrot Crossbill.

Ron steered us through the reasons for reaching these conclusions. In addition to material on the measurements of birds in the field that showed populations with 3 sizes of bills, there were also clear signs of habitat differentiation between the populations. However the best method of telling these cryptic species apart was undoubtedly their vocalisations, in particular the 'chip' call familiar to anyone who has worked crossbills. Having recorded hundreds of birds across Scotland and Northern England and using sonagrams and taped calls to demonstrate the differences, Ron gave a preview of a forthcoming paper on the situation. Indeed taping of birds on the continent suggests that the taxonomy was also interesting elsewhere. Work on crossbill DNA indicated that the differences between Scottish crossbills were not as great as that seen between other passerines but the other evidence indicated that they were indeed acting as good species. A case where ecological and morphological differentiation had moved ahead of genetic differentiation. After Martin's talk on trying to shoehorn a continuum of taxonomic variation into just 2 categories, Ron's explanation of the complexities of crossbills was a brilliant coup.

Ron Summers



Andy Thorpe

Andy Thorpe, local recorder for North-east Scotland, told us something of his new responsibilities as recorder for the North Sea Bird Club. Stretching the credulity of other local recorders, Andy definitely stated that he was paid to be recorder for the North Sea Bird Club! Well sponsored by the oil and gas industry, the NSBC has been collecting bird records from the rigs, production platforms and boats that are stationed offshore. The records are gradually being databased and Andy showed us some of the material that has already been analysed from the large assembly of records. Some of the photographs of falls of migrants on the rigs were almost unbelievable, with ranks of exhausted passerines bedecking the structures, hunted by veritable flocks of Long-eared Owls ! The North Sea Bird Club, celebrating its 21st birthday, has clearly come of age.

Steve Willis took us through the delights of landing on the remote Treshnish Islands off the Argyll coast. Steve and other Argyll enthusiasts land annually on the islands for a spell of survey and ringing work. This has allowed them to build up a detailed picture of the island's avifauna. The rigours of camping on the islands were interesting, having to put up with the nocturnal girnings of European Storm Petrel, Manx Shearwater and worst of all, Corn Crake, all birds that many would be quite keen to be disturbed by at night! Compensation apparently came at the bottom of the bottle of Grouse tucked away behind the stove! The ringing results were particularly interesting and showed what a small group of people could accomplish in a short spell of work undertaken on an annual basis.

This most successful conference was formally closed by Brian Downing with thanks to the SOC staff and volunteers who helped to make things run smoothly. The organisers promise that lapel microphones would be available next year to allow the deafer members, who seem to habitually sit at the back, to hear properly.

Ray Murray

The best of days

One of the benefits of taking early retirement is that it gives one the opportunity to travel. One of the benefits of travel is that it gives one the opportunity to see new birds.

So, having freed ourselves from the shackles of general medical practice, my wife and I decided to travel. We went first to the West Indies by banana boat and then round the world on a copra boat. This article is a short, bird-orientated account of these journeys. Deeply hidden in what follows is a brief description of our 'best of days' amongst birds.

'Birds of the West Indies' by James Bond provided all we needed to identify the birds we saw in and around these islands. Ian Fleming's hero was named after this author when Fleming, in search of a name, glanced idly at his own copy in Jamaica.

After making landfall on Barbuda we arrived in Antigua. Offshore were several Frigate Birds (Man O' War Birds) and the harbour of St. John's contained many Laughing Gulls. These are the only gulls to be found in any number in the West Indies. Their call is like a hearty, cackling human laugh. We saw a Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and Brown Pelicans on the way over to beautiful English Harbour and then a Cattle Egret sitting on a cow.

On passage to St. Kitts we came upon an Audubon's Shearwater and many Brown Boobies. The former is commoner around Mustique and the other Grenadines. St. Kitts, together with St. Lucia and Barbados, had too many distractions for us to think about birds but we had, near Soufrière in the south of St. Lucia, a wonderful close-up view of a Green Heron or 'Poor Joe.' This is one of the commonest water birds of the West Indies.

Then to Grenada where we jumped ship. We were lucky enough to be able to stay for a night with the hospitable Mrs. Betty Mascoll. Her old plantation home still contains some of the English furniture her forebears took out with them when they settled to cultivate sugar cane at the north end of the island. The 'large dragonfly' I was watching on the bougainvillaea which covered the terrace was in fact an Antillean Crested Humming Bird. Next morning, we found and freed another variety, Green-throated Carib, which was trapped between the sashes of one of our bedroom windows. On the outskirts of Grenada's capital, St. George's, we saw a Carib Grackle. But sailing time approached and the taxi driver was not keen to stop to let us look longer. 'St. George's is a great little town,' he said, 'but very jammy!' (meaning traffic-jammy).

On St. Vincent, north of Mustique, Dr. Earle

Kirby was leaving his little museum in the botanic garden as we arrived. He saw us laughing at the goggle-eyed appearance of a Bare-eyed Thrush (or Yam Bird) and kindly spent half an hour pointing out other species. A most charming man, he is an expert on Caribbean birds and their calls. From the latter he was able to deduce events such as the arrival of a particular predator. We identified a Tropical Mockingbird and a Yellow-bellied Elaenia. Kirby confirmed a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher (also known as the St. Vincent Flycatcher) which we had seen earlier at the famous breadfruit tree in the gardens. This tree was the first of its kind brought from Tahiti by Captain Bligh in a failed attempt by the British Government to provide food for the African slaves working on the new St. Vincent sugar plantations. Dr. Kirby pointed out a St. Vincent Bullfinch saying, 'He's not in the books. This is a local subspecies.' There is little interbreeding among the birds of the Caribbean islands and that only occasional and after a hurricane.

The Bank Line runs a continuous copra and palm oil collecting service for the UK, each of its four ships going round the world westwards with many interesting ports of call. Each carries a handful of passengers. We travelled on the 'Clydebank' and looked forward in particular to the long, winding crossing of the Pacific.

On the long haul to Tahiti we stood one afternoon right in the bows enjoying the fine weather and the steady roll induced by the trade wind. A Brown Booby landed on the rail just beside us and watched carefully as the ever-present flying fish zigzagged away from the ship. He then launched a series of chases banking sharply after each zigzag. Most of the chases were won by the fish and he soon gave up.

In Fiji we had much more time and the use of our own car. The reference book here was 'Birds of the Fiji Bush' by Fergus Clunie (Fiji Museum, Suva 1984). Red-vented Bulbuls landed on the ship as we docked and were numerous round the National Rugby Ground. The Brown Mynah is fun at home but not in Fiji. Introduced from India to combat caterpillar pests on crops, they have overbred and the incredible noise and mess they make is now a major problem.

Our day in the delta of the Rewa river, away to the east of Suva and beyond Nausori, was probably our best bird day ever. A tapioca farmer advised 'Don't leave your car. Don't stop in villages. Too much violence. Too much thumping the man!' and while we thought twice before leaving we had no problems. The delta provides many habitats and thus a mass of birds. From these we identified several new species. The names were wonderful. Here was the Jungle Mynah, the Polynesian Triller, the Golden Whistler, the Vanikoro Broadbill, the Wood Swallow, the Pacific Swallow and the White-rumped Swiftlet. A magnificent Pacific Harrier flew low over the marsh reminding us of the Marsh Harriers of the Camargue. On the way back to Suva we saw a Reef Heron and, out to sea, beautiful White-tailed Tropicbirds. That evening we ate ashore. Two varieties of Honey Eater, the Orange-breasted and the Wattled, were feeding in bushes in the hotel grounds.

The small Fiji Museum sits in trees in its own grounds. Many unidentified parrots fly around these trees but Kirsty's favourite bird of all time was unmistakable. This is the Red-headed Parrot-finch. It is only 10 cm. in length and very tame, looking for scraps from visitors. It is a brilliant green with a scarlet head, neck and rump, a real 'mini-parrot'. Clunie's book remarks oddly 'Incompetent observers may confuse the young of this species with the Pink-billed Parrot-finch which is buxom but rather vulgar-looking'!

At Lautoka in Western Fiji I in turn found my favourite Fijian bird. This is the Red Avadavat, a striking little bird found in flocks. It has multiple white spots on a red background, hence its second name of Strawberry Finch.

Our next call was at New Caledonia where the Cagou, a flightless bird, is a national symbol and where there were many Spotted Fantails. In Vanuatu we saw large numbers of White-tailed Kingfishers, many a long way from water.

The ship's holds were now full and after a call at Darwin, in what the locals call 'the top end' of Australia, we passed through the dangerous waters of Indonesia on the way up to Singapore. We had again had a wonderful time and the ship now had no more calls to make. Winter was beginning in the Northern Hemisphere and, after many months in the warmth of the Pacific, low temperatures did not appeal to us!

Bill Yule

Bird Books
We have either **Got it** or can **Get it**
If good we will **Buy it**
Ian & Angela Langford
Bookcorner
Wigtown
DG8 9HQ
01988-402010

Garden Birds

Good numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares arrived in Scotland just before Christmas and no doubt this year's excellent crop of Hawthorn, Blackthorn and other berry-bearing shrubs has contributed widely. Bohemian Waxwings have also appeared in large numbers. Several reports of large mixed finch flocks have been reported feeding in fields with Linseed stubble being particularly popular.

By and large more and more birds, of more and more species, are coming into our gardens. We know this from the hugely successful Garden BirdWatch scheme.

New gardens are urgently needed for this survey, within Scotland, especially in the rural and urban areas. The scheme costs £10 a year, which covers the running cost of the project. In return participants are supplied with everything they need for recording the weekly totals of birds, a quarterly magazine, *Bird Table*, useful discounts off quality bird food and equipment from CJ WildBird Foods, and expert advice to help you identify and look after the birds in your garden. This is an excellent opportunity to really help the birds and at the same time contribute to scientific conservation research.

For further information please contact: Andrew Cannon on 01842 750050 or email; andrew.cannon@bto.org.

Chaffinch *A D Johnson*

Orkney successes

Hen Harriers nesting on some Orkney moorlands reared between 16-18 young in 2000. It was noted that 6 females had clutches of 6 eggs and a single male was feeding 4 of them!

The new wind turbines on Burgar Hill did not effect 3 Red-throated Diver pairs that chose to nest near them. In total between 16-20 pairs of Red-throated Divers fledged 11 young from the reserve.

Waders also had a good year at The Loons and Loch of Banks with Northern Lapwing numbers up by 29% and Eurasian Curlews up by a quarter.

Attack of the killer Hedgehogs

The RSPB, SNH and the Scottish Executive have started a 3 year project to assess ways of protecting ground-nesting birds on the Outer Hebrides from Hedgehogs. After being introduced to South Uist in 1974, Hedgehogs spread to Benbecula and North Uist, now numbering at least 5000 adults. Egg predation by Hedgehogs has been shown to be responsible for high levels of breeding failure of Dunlin, and the spread of Hedgehogs has coincided with some disastrous declines in Hebridean waders (65% decline in Dunlin, 57% Ringed Plover, 40% Common Redshank, 40% Common Snipe). Fencing important breeding areas provides some protection from Hedgehogs, but is not always entirely effective, so Nigel Buxton, chairman of the project management group, stated that they will have to assess the feasibility of reducing the number of Hedgehogs on either some or all of the islands. Phase 1 of the Uist Wader Project is expected to cost the participating organisations around £300,000.

Meanwhile, the estimated cost of eradicating American Mink from the Uists has been estimated at £1.65 million over the next 5 years. SNH has earmarked £443,000 towards the cost of the project, which will involve the phased eradication of Mink from South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist. This will allow an estimate of the amount of time and money required for follow-up schemes on Lewis and Harris. Mink eradication is fundamental to the objectives of the five SPAs on the Uists, and SNH has hence applied for the balance of funding to be met by the EC LIFE III fund.

Western Capercaillie breeding success

Despite deer fences still taking a toll on the troubled Western Capercaillie, 12 young were reared in the Abernethy Forest study area in 2000, and more elsewhere on the reserve. Over the last 2 years no young had been raised in the study area. However, on a bleaker side, the breeding success in 2000 is not enough to halt the decline of the species. The RSPB continues to press the forestry industry and estates to remove or adept fences in key capercaillie areas and is trying to visit estates which hold capercaillie to offer advice, based on the most up-to-date research.

Egg collector found guilty at Dornoch Sheriff Court

Mark Kidd Dawson from Carlisle pled guilty to being in possession of 2 Black-throated Diver eggs which were illegally taken from a nest in Sutherland in May 2000. He was fined £1000. Pat Thompson, Conservation Officer for the RSPB in North Scotland, expressed his gratitude to the Northern Constabulary for their vigilance in apprehending egg thieves and also to the public for the continued vigilance and support in helping to catch these criminals.

Spotted Crake - a first nest for Scotland

Spotted Crake is a scarce and irregular breeding bird in Scotland. What is believed to be the first nest ever found here was discovered last year after radio tracking a bird for 5 weeks on breeding territory. Fourteen of the 17 eggs hatched successfully. Only one other nest has been found in the UK in the last 100 years.

Scottish Osprey falls victim to Crocodile

When Doudou Ndong killed a crocodile near his village, 300 km upriver in The Gambia, he found a bird ring in its stomach and sent the details to the return address. It turned out that the ring belonged to a Scottish Osprey!

The bird in question was ringed as a nestling in 1998 by Dave Anderson on a nesting platform at Loch Awe, Argyll. The platform, set up by Forest Enterprise, had been used for the first time in 1997. There are many previous ringing recoveries of Ospreys from West Africa, as well as records from birds fitted with satellite transmitters – it is almost impossible to go to The Gambia without seeing a colour-ringed Osprey – but we can only conjecture how this bird came to be eaten by a Crocodile. It is feasible that it had already died when the Croc found it, and was scavenged, but more fun to think of the Osprey and the Croc both going for the same fish simultaneously.

2000 - Worst year on record for Golden Eagles

RSPB Scotland reports that 2000 has been the worst year on record for Golden Eagle poisoning.

It has been confirmed that 3 Golden Eagles were illegally poisoned in 2000 yet there have been no prosecutions for any of these attacks. Dave Dick, RSPB Scotland Senior Investigations Officer, said: 'This year has been disastrous for finding poisoned birds. There is no question that these crimes have been particularly targeted at Golden Eagles. Golden Eagles are a Scottish icon and it is a disgrace that crimes like this are still being committed.'

Mr Dick went on: 'These 3 birds were all found poisoned in areas traditionally good for Golden Eagles. Sadly a large majority of poisoning incidents take place on sporting estates - too many for pure coincidence'

Stuart Housden, Director RSPB Scotland, said: 'I am saddened that once again only some owners and managers of sporting estates have condemned this illegal activity. This undermines the claim that they are guardians of the countryside and lets down the good reputation of those estates who do conserve our natural heritage.'

REVIEWS

In Search of Nature *D A Ratcliffe. Peregrine Books, Leeds. 2000. 249pp 24 colour plates & 24 black & white illustrations. ISBN 0-9536543-11. Available from Peregrine Books (£27 incl. p&p), 27 Hunger Hills Avenue, Harsforth, Leeds LS18 5JB*

Most mountain bird enthusiasts will already have well-thumbed copies of Derek Ratcliffe's monographs on the Peregrine and Raven on their bookshelves. This is a more personal book, beginning with how his interest in wildlife was awakened over 50 years ago. From schoolboy forays by push-bike into the countryside around his parent's home in Carlisle, we learn that the author's area of exploration and study was gradually extended by bus and train (on railway lines long since disappeared) to take in the Lake District and the Galloway Hills. University days at Sheffield and Bangor, a National Service posting to the north-eastern Pennines and subsequent employment as a research officer with the Nature Conservancy in Scotland, were all seized upon as further opportunities to develop what proved to be a lifelong passion for natural history and nature conservation. Amongst other things, Dr Ratcliffe allows the reader to share his red-letter days of successful assaults on formidable-looking nesting crags and the discovery of hitherto unknown localities for some of Britain's rarest montane plants and animals. Just as he was first inspired by the example and writing of the naturalists of yesteryear, this new work will undoubtedly stir the imagination of yet another generation of upland ecologists.

John Mitchell

The Sibley Guide to Birds. *David A Sibley. Chanticleer Press 2000. 544pp. ISBN 0-679-45122-6*

With birders visiting North America on a more regular basis today, the need for a comprehensive identification guide has become ever more pressing, especially in view of North America's rapidly expanding taxonomic list. Recent years have provided some excellent efforts, following the footsteps of the pioneering field guide work by Roger Tory Peterson. The 5 year preparation work by the author was time well spent since this latest guide is a masterpiece in many ways.

The artwork is of an exceptionally high standard, with the occasionally 'quirky' drawings, nevertheless summing up the character of the species e.g. Great-tailed Grackle in flight. Much of the book's real value lies in the depth of treatment which each species receives in terms of regional variations, or plumage states. Even hybrids are well handled, with the large gulls providing a valuable overview of the countless possibilities guaranteed to excite the few! With so much attention dedicated to artwork, the text is limited and tends to concentrate on the few salient features, essential for identification. Useful comparisons with similar species are offered, and much attention is focused on calls and song, so it's possible that the 'book-based' birder looking for more detailed written descriptions might find fault here. However, each illustration also has comments with pointers highlighting the key features of each species, much in the manner of the Peterson guides. Preceding each group of birds, there are illustrations of all the species found within it, facilitating the speed of reference for beginners and seasoned campaigners alike. In addition, there are wee extras such as the flight patterns of displaying hummingbirds and special reference to the features of crossbills (groan) which offer as full a treatment as one might reasonably expect of a field guide.

It would be easy to pick holes in this book. It's 'big' and not easily carried in the field; I still find range maps covering such a large land mass difficult to use; and there is copious treatment of some recent escapees (particularly Parrots) while other species which have occurred in North America are missing or merely given a brief mention e.g. Eurasian Kestrel and Cahow. But that would be nit-picking, since the real beauty of this work likes in the thoroughness of its artwork. For those of you contemplating a trip to North America you should seriously consider increasing the weight of your baggage by including this book.

Angus Hogg

Introduction to vocalizations of crossbills in north-western Europe. *Magnus S Robb, in Dutch Birding 22(2):61-107 (accompaning CD with 75 tracks, playing time 61:56).*

Six Common Crossbill types are compared with Two-barred, Scottish and Parrot Crossbills. Very detailed examination and useful reference for anyone with an interest in vocal types of crossbills. Further analysis is planned and particularly for Scottish and Parrot Crossbill, it would be of interest to see how these types compare with those described by Dr Ron Summers at the Annual SOC conference in Newtonmore. Slowing down these often very similar calls (tracks 63-71) yields surprising results and as the author states, "recording equipment may become as important for the birder interested in crossbills as a camera is for the serious gull-watcher".

Copies available from the Dutch Birding Association (Iepenlaan 11, 1901 ST Castricum, Netherlands), cost £5.60. Credit card orders by post to the above address or by email to circulation@dutchbirding.nl , including details of credit card type, account number and expiry date.Ordering details at http://www.dutchbirding.nl.

Bob Dawson

Atlas das Aves Invernantes do Baixo Alentejo *by Gonçalo L. Elias, Luís M. Reino , Tiago Silva, Ricardo Tomé & Pedro Geraldes (Coords) Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves 1998. 416 pp, drawings and maps. ISBN 972-96786-2-6 (pbk) £28.99.*

Birders who visit southern Portugal mostly remain in the Algarve. The subject of this wintering atlas is the province to the north, Baixo (lower) Alentejo, a relatively sparsely populated area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Spanish border. It has large areas of woodland in the west, while in the east agricultural steppe predominates. Wetland is scarce, especially in the east. Although a breeding atlas is available for the whole of Portugal, there were far fewer observers to call upon to produce a national winter atlas. A regional work was therefore organised and this is the result. Field work was carried out in December and January for the three winters 1992-95. The survey unit was the familiar 10 km square.

The text is in English as well as Portuguese, with excellent translations of each introductory chapter and all species accounts. Each species has a clear map and there are some fine illustrations. This is a well-produced book and the authors are to be congratulated. It comes highly recommended if you happen to be wintering in southern Portugal.

Norman Elkins

Also received:
Birds of Angola *by W R J Dean (ISBN 1-803-865-913) – BOU, Tring, £50.*
This is number 18 in the BOU Checklist series and contains the customary comprehensive list of birds and where they might be found, including breeding information. There are also some photographs illustrating typical topography.

Birdwatcher's Year Book 2001 *(ISBN 0-9533840-20) – Buckingham Press, Peterborough, £14.*
Contains all the usual information and features, and has this year a 21st anniversary feature on Wildlife Trusts.

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Wanted for *SBN*

'The Best of Days, The Worst of Days....'

Extracts from your notebooks/logs or journals which describe your best (or worst) days out in the field. Doesn't have to be about Scotland, but the more Scottish submissions we get, the better. Articles should aim to be about 1 page of *SBN*, about 1800 to 2000 words. Please send them to the Editor at **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT, email mail@the-soc.org.uk, fax 0131 558 9947.**

FOR SALE

Birds - Original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to: **Vanellus Presentations, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362.**

SOC car stickers
Ian Andrews has designed a smart new car sticker featuring the Club's new logo. These can be purchased from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, at 50 pence each plus a second class stamp.

'Quicktide'

'Quicktide' is a card based system that allows you to calculate the tide times for your local area for the next 2 years. Available direct from the manufacturers for £7.99 - call Duncan Ogilvie on 0117 9736699 for further information, or look up the website http://www.quicktide.co.uk

Tiree accommodation

Bird Clubs and SOC branches that are considering going to Tiree to tick off Corn Crakes and enjoy the legendary numbers of breeding shorebirds might want to stay at the Hynish Centre. The Centre is let as a facility to groups of all ages. The 'Alan Stevenson House' provides accommodation for up to 24 people in 8 bunk bedrooms, while superior accommodation for 8 is provided by the 'Morton Boyd House'. Group discounts apply for 12 or more.

For booking and information, contact the Warden - tel/fax 01879 220726, email Ssmith4267@aol.com

Glasgow Natural History Society
are celebrating their **150th Anniversary** with
a Conference on
Alien Species - Friends or Foes?
15-16 JUNE 2001
in the
Boyd Orr Building, University of Glasgow

16 speakers will cover a wide range of
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form on our web site:-
www.gnhs.freeuk.com
or contact the conference secretary for a
booking form or further details
Mrs Morag C Mackinnon
71 Hillview Drive, Clarkston
Glasgow G76 7JJ
Tel 0141 638 2123 Fax 0141 557 6281
e-mail moragmac@clara.net

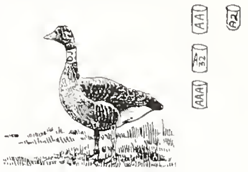
REQUESTS

Colour-ringed Dunlin

Since 1997 we have been colour ringing breeding adult and pullus Dunlin at various locations in Orkney. All birds ringed as adults are identifiable as individuals. On the right leg there is a yellow colour ring above the knee, and two colour rings below the knee. The left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. The chicks also have a yellow colour ring above the knee on the right leg and the left leg has a colour ring above the BTO metal ring. Birds ringed as chicks are only identifiable as to the year in which they were ringed. Even if the combinations are incomplete, we would be grateful for all sightings of birds that have a YELLOW colour ring above the knee on the right leg. All sightings should be sent to either **Stuart Williams Crafty, Firth, Orkney KW17 2ES Tel: 0185676 1742 email Stuart@gavia.freeserve.co.uk, or Jim Williams, Fairholm, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EQ Tel: 0185676 1317** Acknowledgement will be sent along with full history of the bird.

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylag Geese bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR Tel: 01862 894329 email Bob.Swann@hcs.uhi.ac.uk.**



This is DJ – collars should be read from the bottom up.

Falkirk area Kestrel and Swift Surveys

Please send in your records of Common Kestrels and Swifts in the Falkirk Local Authority area, especially nest sites of both species and screaming parties of Swifts, to **Angus Smith, 9 Braehead Grove, Bo'ness EH51 0EG.** This survey is organised by the SOC in cooperation with Falkirk Area Local Biodiversity Partnership. (Details can be found on the SOC website under Surveys).

Third Conference of the European Ornithologists' Union 22-26 August 2001

The third conference of the EOU will take place in Groningen, The Netherlands, from 21 to 26 August 2001. Excursions to various wetlands will take place on 24 August. The overall aim is to explore the biological hurdles in the annual cycles of birds, such as: John Croxall *'Surviving the roaring forties: tracking foraging and migrating albatrosses and allies'*, Jan van der Winden *'The odyssey of the Black Tern: champion of a vanishing niche?'* and Eberhard Gwinner *'In search of the clock: mechanisms, functions and dependence on environmental conditions'*. Further details can be found on the NOU website http://www.nou.nu

The annual meeting of the International Wader Study Group (WSG) will be held in the vicinity of Groningen, 31 August – 2 September 2001. This should provide ideal opportunities to combine 2 exciting meetings in a single visit.

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 2000 were:

July - 1st £30 D Shepherd, Dundee; 2nd £20 M Bickmore, Selkirk; 3rd £10 J Walker, Leeds.
August - 1st £50 C McLellan, Peebles; 2nd £30 S Jackson, Falmouth; 3rd £20 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 4th £10 N Grist, Glasgow.
September - 1st £30 S McCulloch, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 G Riddle, Culzean; 3rd N Grist, Glasgow.

If you are an SOC member and over 18, you can always join the 200 Club. Join now for £6, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', and you will be entered for the monthly draws until 31May 2001, the end of our 'year'. Your cheque will be acknowledged with thanks. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176).**

Nominations for Vice-President

Ian Andrews will take over the role of President from Brian Downing at the 2001 AGM. Nominations for a new Vice-President to replace Ian are required. Nominations are also required for a member of Council. Nominations should be signed by the proposer and seconder and sent to **The Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT** no later than 31 July 2001.

2001 Annual Conference

The 2001 SOC Annual Conference is again being held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore, over the weekend 26-28 October 2001. Full details will be sent out with the September mailing.

2001-2002 Winter meetings

Dates of first meetings in the 2001-2002 winter session are as follows:

Ayrshire - 19 Sept; Borders - 10 Sept; Caithness - 19 Sept; Clyde - 10 Sept; Dumfries - 10 October; Fife - 12 Sept; Grampian - 10 Sept; Highland - 11 Sept;Lothian - 18 Sept; Stewartry - 20 Sept; Stirling - 13 Sept; Tayside - 13 Sept; and West Galloway - 9 October. A full programme will be sent out with the September mailing.

South-east Scotland Discussion Group

The South-east Scotland Discussion Group meets on the first Wednesday of every month between September and April. Topics include recent and proposed surveys, both local and national, plus local conservation issues. Tea and cakes are provided towards the end of the meeting, before a 'Round Table' for recent bird sightings or news. All members are welcome. The dates for the remainder of 2001 are as follows; please note that the April meeting will be on the second Wednesday of the month - 11 April. All meetings are held in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace at 1930hrs.

Wednesday 11 April; Wednesday 5 September; Wednesday 3 October; Wednesday 7 November and Wednesday 5 December.

Mute Swan Census 2001

As announced in the December 2000 edition of *SBN* a national census of Mute Swans will take place in Spring 2001. This census will repeat those undertaken in 1983 and 1990, with the specific aims of determining the size of the Mute Swan population, quantifying the number of territorial and breeding pairs in addition to the number of non-territorial birds.

The census is being organised by the WWT in association with the BTO, Swan Study Group and the SOC, on whose behalf we are co-ordinating the Scottish part of the survey. Survey methods are very straightforward, involving simply counting all swans and noting whether or not the birds are breeding (e.g. with a nest or a brood of cygnets). There is an emphasis on counting non-breeding flocks in mid-April to avoid problems of double-counting of these through movements between flock sites.

The survey unit is the 10 km square of the national grid and observers will be asked to visit all suitable habitat for Mute Swans within their allocated square or part of a square. Whilst we hope that full coverage can be obtained for Scotland, some preselection of 10 km squares has taken place after discussion with the various local organisers. These squares must be covered as a minimum requirement of the survey. They relate primarily to areas where on-going studies of the Mute Swan can guarantee full coverage, squares which held 50 or more swans in the 1990 census all squares occupied in the 1990 census and a random selection of other squares in the more remote areas. It is hoped that this method will result in counting the vast majority of Mute Swans in Scotland.

Given that the population in our own study area of Lothians and Fife has doubled between 1990 and 1999, we anticipate that many other parts of Scotland will show substantial increases since 1990. Consequently, it is likely that the species has occupied many additional territories and developed new flock sites in recent years, some of these sites themselves being new farm ponds and reservoirs not shown on Ordnance Survey maps. All selected 10 km squares, therefore, will require to be checked thoroughly. In Scotland the additional problems of remoteness of sites and lack of observers could hinder the aim of full coverage. Local organisers, therefore, will greatly appreciate offers of help with the census to ensure its success.

A list of local organisers in Scotland and the areas for which they are responsible is shown below; they will be able to allocate an area to cover and provide survey forms and instructions. Please volunteer your services to help with the survey in your area – even if this is just checking your local site rather than a full 10 km square as such data will be invaluable to achieving a comprehensive survey. If you are unclear which local organiser to contact please let us know and we will direct you to the relevant person. If you cannot commit to a specific area please keep a note of any territorial or breeding pairs and April flocks you come across anywhere in Scotland in 2001 and send them to us for forwarding to the responsible local organiser. All such observations will be gratefully received.

The support and enthusiasm we have received from local organisers suggests that this will be the most successful Mute Swan census in Scotland to date, but this can only be achieved with the support of birdwatchers in Scotland. The species has a very high profile with the public and it is up to birdwatchers to provide the data on which its present status can be determined. As there are a number of colour ringing schemes taking place in Scotland this can add to the interest of the survey and the value of these studies so please record any rings (colour and numbers/letters) you may see.

Let us hope for a successful survey and we wait in anticipation the forthcoming results which will be published in *Scottish Birds*.

Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG.
Tel: 01334 656804,
email: swans@allanbrown.co.uk.

Scottish Mute Swan Census 2001
List of Local Organisers

Aberdeenshire (with Kincardine and Deeside): Alistair and Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadfold Drive, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen AB23 8PP. Tel 01224 823184 Alistair@cairncry.freeserve.co.uk

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Thanks

Thanks are once again due to the volunteers who give assistance in the office, and also those who came in to assist in despatching the June mailing. If you would like to help with this task, please contact Sylvia at the SOC office on **0131 556 6042** for details.

Recent Reports
mid November 2000 - mid February 2001 - a review of winter 2000-2001

There is no doubt whatsoever that the main event of this winter was the **Bohemian Waxwing** invasion that produced the largest numbers since winter 1996-97. As always exact numbers are almost impossible to gauge but at least 2000 birds were involved from around 21 Dec. The invasion really took off during the first week of January with the largest numbers along the east coast before building up in the west from around 10 January. Good numbers were still about into February. The largest reported counts included 200+ at Shields Road, Glasgow on 5 February (with a flock of 128 elsewhere in Glasgow on the same day, possible part of the 200+), 150 at Cambuslang, Glasgow on 21 January, 141 at Bridge of Don, Aberdeen on 11 February, 132 at Dumfries on 5 January, 114+ in Elgin from 3 February and 100 at Gilmore Park, Edinburgh on 4 January. There were numerous other counts in the 30-80 birds range whilst 84 in Troon on 31 January is an Ayrshire record, and 24 on Islay on 29 December is an island record. By mid Feb 106 birds had been colour-ringed in and around Aberdeen in an attempt to track the birds' movements so please report any sightings.

Apart from the Waxwing influx, this winter has certainly lacked sparkle, with memories of a fantastic late autumn fading fast. Two **Brünnich's Guillemots** on Orkney would have lifted the gloom were they not tide line corpses – at Scapa Beach on 21 December and North Ronaldsay on 29 January - whilst a white morph **Gyr Falcon** was reported on North Uist at North Ford on 9 February but not seen again. The only other rarities were all amongst wildfowl, with a first-winter drake **Lesser Scaup** on South Uist on 27 January, a first for the Outer Hebrides and a **Red-breasted Goose** with the **Pink-footed Geese** in the Loch Leven/Powmill area (Kinross) on 21-28 January. On 27 January it flew into Fife briefly and so became the first county record! A female **Black Duck** was present for its second winter at Loch Fleet (Highland) from 10 December. Seven wintering drake **American Wigeons** were reported, including 4 on south mainland Shetland. The good showing in recent years of **Green-winged Teal** continued, with 10+ seen, including the second and third records for Caithness from 21 January. Other wildfowl highlights included up to 4 presumed vagrant small-race **Canada Geese** on Islay (2 of the type *parvipes* and 2 of the type *hutchinsii*) and 2/3 **Ring-necked Ducks**, a drake between Loch Leven and Lochore Meadows (Kinross/Fife) from 28 December, a female at Loch Kindar (Dumfries and Galloway) on 26 December, with presumably the same bird at Carlingwark Loch from 11 February. Only c25 **Smew** were reported with the largest count again at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg ,with up to 5 birds present including 2 drakes.

Little Bitterns were reported in the period from Orkney (fourth record), Fife (first record since 1925 if accepted), Dumfries and Galloway, Aberdeenshire and Loch Lomond. Low numbers of **Little Auks** and no **Horned Larks** or **Lapland Longspurs** was disappointing. Contrasting starkly with last winter white-winged gulls were present in only low numbers with none at all in some northern harbours, which are normally the stronghold. The best numbers were seen at Central Belt dumps and roosts. Surprisingly 3 **Kumlien's Gulls** were seen, on Shetland, in Moray and Lanarkshire whilst *michahellis* **'Yellow-legged Gull'** showed up reasonably well with 7 reported including the first for Shetland at Loch of Cliff, Unst on 10 January. Amongst a reasonable scatter of **Mediterranean Gulls,** a Belgian colour-ringed adult returned to Barassie (Ayrshire) and an adult with a white colour-ring (of either Belgian or Dutch origin) was at Hogganfield Loch (Glasgow) on 10 February. Only 3 **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported, though they did include the adult again at Stromness (Orkney) – back for its fourteenth winter. Wintering waders included single **Whimbrel** in Ayrshire and Borders, 2 **Spotted Redshanks** at Kinneil (Upper Forth) and 10+ **Green Sandpipers,** whilst a **Grey Phalarope** was seen at Musselburgh on 30 December.

Red-breasted Goose *Fred Westcott*

Taking **Bohemian Waxwing** out of the equation, the only scarce passerine to show up well was **Black Redstart** with c15 seen, mostly along the east coast. The only **Water Pipit** was at Largo Bay, Fife, from 17 December, whilst the largest count of **Brambling** reported was 200+ at Banchory (Aberdeenshire) on 11 February. Only 2 **Great Grey Shrikes** were reported, on Orkney in December and at Carron Valley Reservoir in February whilst up to 6 **Mealy Redpolls** at Lochore Meadows (Fife) in January and February were the only ones reported and an **Arctic Redpoll** was at Stilligarry, South Uist, on 13 December (possibly of the race *hornemanni*).

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News

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Martin Collinson
Assisted by
Ian Andrews, Helen Cameron and Sylvia Laing

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 65th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

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